11 Death March kara Hajimaru Isekai Kyousoukyoku

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Part 1 - Victory Celebration Party

Satou's here. Celebrations are pleasant to have, but I prefer to refrain from showy things such as a parade. Arisa and the others who like attentions are happy about it though....

◇

"Celebrating the Floormaster subjugation, cheers!"
""""Cheers!""""

Today, I've lead people to have a toast several times already in the Ivy Mansion.

The plan is for us to return to the labyrinth city after three days.
It seems that there's never a case where people who've gone to subjugate a floormaster come back in the same day, so after considering the time to travel there and subjugate the floormaster, the schedule has become like such.
It has already been half a day since the victory celebration party started after we crushed the floormaster and teleported back to the Ivy Mansion though.

◇

We teleported back to the Ivy Mansion after we had finished collecting the booty and the squid's body and tentacles that had relatively little damage.

I'm concerned about the situation above, but I should really straighten up the things with my companions first.
I called only Arisa to my private workshop in the Ivy Mansion.

I made up my mind, and told her the information about the reincarnated people and demon lords, unique skills, and god's fragments I've heard from [No Life King] Zen and the Dog-head Demon Lord, I also added my opinion regarding them.

"--that's about it."
"I was wondering what kind of secret it was...."

Since she had fallen silent with severe face, I hugged her, put her head on my chest, and was about to pat her, but she lightly replied, "Of course I knew about it", so my hand which was going to pat her head froze.

"I mean, god had explained about those things when I was being reincarnated."
"Can you tell me the detail?"

Since Arisa put her hands below her lips and said some half-asleep things, "I'll talk anything if you give me a sweet kiss", I made her talk with [Order].

"Uuh, you cheapskate."
"Okay okay, just talk."

Good grief, I don't understand how far is Arisa's action being serious.

"U~n, you see. I can't talk about everything I've heard you know? God forbid me to speak, or rather put a restriction about it."

Arisa began to talk with that preface.

There's not much new information.

--When someone gets reincarnated, they acquire the god's fragments, one fragment gives one unique skill.

I've already roughly guessed this.

--The soul of the human needs to have the aptitude in order to receive the god's fragment.

Most reincarnation candidates can't even accept one fragment and get their souls annihilated, someone that can accept two or more fragments seems to be a rarity.
According to Arisa, it seems that she could somehow feel about, "I can still go on", or, "It's already impossible", when she was receiving the fragments.

--The reincarnated people who have acquired the god's fragment won't necessarily become a demon lord themselves.

Rather, it seems them becoming a demon lord is something that's quite rare. Although there are cases where a single-fragment holder became a demon lord, most are the one who has three or more fragments.
....That means, more than Arisa who has two fragments, isn't it more dangerous for me who have four?

--The usage number of the unique skill is the limiter of soul.

You can exceed the number of uses, but the soul which exceeds the unique skill usage limit will become unable to hold the god's fragment.
And then, at the time the soul can't hold it anymore, the soul, which is the vessel, will be either broken or annihilated, and transformed into a demon lord.

The, "Fall into despair and become a demon lord" that the Dog-head Demon Lord was going about probably referred to how reincarnated people who've fallen in despair exceed the unique skill usage limit and transform into a demon lord.

Lastly, I inquire her information about the god.

"So, what's the name of the god who reincarnated Arisa?"
"That you see~, the god only told me『God』so I lightly consented,『I see~, it's the god~』. Like in stories about reincarnation, there's no one who asks the name of the god right?"
"Did you see how the god looked like?"
"The god met me as a soul without a body, so I don't know. I don't know whether the god

was a man or a woman, an old man or an infant, handsome or uncouth, I didn't even know if the god had human-like appearance."

She heard some unfamiliar word such as god reincarnation, but she ignored it since she somehow understood it.
In conclusion, the god's identity seems to be unknown.

I can guess god's identity to a certain extent, but since it's not good to arbitrarily decide upon it, I put aside the conclusion.
Since the other party is a god, there's a possibility that I may have been misled.

Before all that, I don't even know if it was really the god.
A devil or a third party pretending to be a god is a cliché in tales after all.

◇

I feel chills down the spine when I heard that Arisa was going to exceed her limit to fight the Dog-head Demon Lord when we met him.
I make her taste eight pickled plums so she reflects on it. Of course the underlying cause was because of myself who was hiding my true level, so it might be a good time to tell her about it soon.

I could just tell it to Arisa, but I decided to also tell Liza who tends to worry like her.
Since other members don't seem to mind about my capability in battles, I'm considering whether to tell them about it after I see these two people's reaction.

"Three hundreds and eleven?"
"As expected of Master."

'Poka~n', Arisa's mouth falls like there's a sound effect, looks like she can't continue talking, her mouth is still open.
Liza speaks words of admiration like she's proud about it while being surprised, she nods marvelously.
Liza grinning like this might be quite rare.

The difference in these two's reaction must depend on whether they have the actual feeling about the abnormality of the news.
Especially Liza, since she has been focused in fighting higher leveled enemies with the boost and her equipments, she must no have the actual feeling of needing more experience points as her level increases. From her viewpoint, she must recognize level 311 as only, "Something that can be reached someday if you just work hard."

I'm thinking of telling it to other members if they ask me to tell them.
I instructed the two to keep the information about my level an absolute secret.

◇

Now then, the thing regarding my companions is enough with this, next let's care about the

mansion like the employees and such.

Before calling Arisa, I had checked the situation in the residence and the city with [Clairvoyance], it seemed to have become quite a big uproar.

Ms. Miteruna at the mansion, Porina at the worker row house, and the two Beautiful Wings at the orphanage and the training school each struggled hard to keep the order at their respective place.
Thanks to them, looks like people who tend to feel anxious aren't panicking. The infants were grandly crying, but I expect the older children around to comfort them.

The city is the one in big uproar instead.
People are flooding to the viceroy's mansion, Explorer Guild and the Labyrinth Army's garrison, and are making uproars big enough it could cause riots.

At the Explorer Guild, the guildmaster shot fireballs to the sky and declared, "The demon lord will come if you don't be quiet!" which did stop the uproar from getting bigger, but she got scolded by an elf girl and the secretary-san beside her.

On that subject, Ms. Sebelkea the elf is a beautiful little girl that looks calm, although I've never met her directly. When I heard about her heroic tale from the guildmaster during our drinking bout, I imagined that she was unimaginably cute.
The guildmaster probably exaggerated.

Since we couldn't possibly join the uproar, and more importantly, we wouldn't be able to enjoy the party like this, I conveyed, "The demon lord has been defeated by the hero" to Ms. Sebelkea via Aze-san. It took a bit of time to reach her since it had to go through the high elf of her clan.

Nevertheless, it seems to have been properly conveyed, the labyrinth city that was on the verge of riots has now returned to its festive mood.

Akindo the self-proclaimed, "merchant acquainted with Satou", presents a feast to the orphanage and the training school as a congratulatory gift for the, [Demon Lord's Fall].
Of course, the real identity of Akindo is me myself in disguise.
Ah, how complicated.

Just in case, I notified the hero about the Demon Lord's extinction with the transceiver I had received from him before.
Of course as Nanashi, not Satou.

Since the hero seemed to be in the middle of investigating a labyrinth in the weaselkin empire, the one that got in contact with me was a woman with monotonous voice called Nono.
Since she had immediately departed the labyrinth city Selbira to tell the hero in our place, I didn't directly meet her.
She must be a kyonyuu since she's a hero's companion. I wanted to meet her once.

◇

"Hfey, are you dringing?"
"I'm drinking."

The drunken Arisa leaned herself on my collar to entwine my body.
Since Tama and Mia continue to have their furious fight on my lap, she seemed to have given up that side and came from behind.

I've especially permitted them to drink liquor since today is the celebration for the floormaster subjugation.

"That's riight~ andthen violatte this unripe body~"
"Okay okay, I'll gladly accept in 10 years okay."

While tearing Arisa, who's holding my face and going to steal my lips, off me, I vaguely answer her.

"Aren't Tama unfair? I think she's unfair. I mean, not allowing monopoly while monopolizing herself, that's baad isn't iit? That's why, shouldn't you hand it over to me once in a while? Hand it overr."
"Nyu~? Here is Tama's place. Because, it's relieving~?"

Mia having a long talk is rare, but Tama having it is even rarer.
She said monopoly and all, but Mia often sat on my lap herself when Tama wasn't present.

"Liza! This silver meat is really too strong nanodesu!"
"This is quite splendid! Pochi, listen to me okay? First spread magic power on your teeth. However, be careful not to pour too much or your teeth will feel pain."
"Aye nanodesu! Magic Teeth nanodesu!"

As a joke, I've prepared the hard part of the whale that even Lulu's kitchen knife can't cut by cutting it with a holy sword, making it look like sashimis as decorations, not as food, but....
Apparently, it has plucked Liza's and Pochi's heartstrings somehow.

"Kunyunyu, I can't chew it nodesu."
"This chewiness is something I've never encountered before. The taste resembles whale but my stomach won't be able to digest it if I don't chew it properly."
"This meat person is too strong nanodesu!"

Liza and Pochi are probably drunk.
They hold the sandal-sized piece of meat that glitters palely and bite it with all their might, but it seems they can't chew it.
It's amazing they can even leave tooth marks on it.

I'll prescribe them some digestive medicine later so they won't upset their stomach.

"Master, an obstacle in my magic power circulation has emerged. Please the maintenance!"

"Wait, Nana-san, you can't! Don't take off your clothesss~!"

Lulu who's holding a sheet intercepted the drunken Nana who was in the middle of taking off her clothes.
Lulu's action has become too fast ever since her level increased, I feel that the Lucky Lewd Rate has fallen.

The masters and people who've acted as a padding for party are also enjoying themselves with the liquor and the dishes in the party hall.

The drunken masters were grumbling about how they wanted to try new techniques, so I brought them to a hunting ground in the upper layer.
Apparently they've been fired up from our girls' battle.

Even while drunk, they let me see various secret techniques up close, and then I brought them back to the party while they were looking pleased, but for some reason, Mia and Arisa branded me guilty.

I guess it was bad for Ms. Poltomea to be upper half-nude after all?
It's quite upsetting since there's no way I'll crave a girl of around middle-schooler age.

Putting that side, the party continued until morning, we drank the night away by stuffing ourselves with many valuable things like the Dragon Spring liquor and the Dwarf Slayer.

Having more people in a party really is the merrier.

Part 2 - Reunion (1)

Satou's here. Having an unexpected reunion with an old friend is a joyous event. Even if you can't remember the name of the person you're reunited with.

◇

"My, that's quite a big magic core. It looks as if it's the magic core of the floormaster--"

Even though Arisa has half of her face covered in bandage, she presents the huge magic core while looking proud.
The face of the guild staff who received the magic core while looking slightly surprised froze. Since she has item appraisal skill, she probably understands what that magic core is.

She turns toward me, moving like a rusty robot.

"Umm, this is perhaps."
"That's right! We've defeated the floormaster of the upper layer!"

Arisa answers but the guild staff matches her eyes with me, staring as if she wants me to deny it.
Does she really not want to believe it?

"Yes, it's the magic core of the floormaster."

After I declared so, that guild staff fell down fainting. It'll be troubling if the magic core is dropped, so I catch it together with her.
I've never seen her before, wonder if it's a beginner staff?

An older guild staff behind her contacted the guild and took over to nurse the fainted staff.

As for us, we're going to the labyrinth city with his guidance.
Since it seems to be customary for the party who've defeated the floormaster to carry the magic core, I bring it along with me.

◇

Noise spread when we exited the west gate.
There were some uproar when we got out of the labyrinth gate, but it's even bigger here.

We are equipped with old equipments which have been made to look damaged, and also used special make-up and bandages to make it looks like we had a fierce battle.
We don't actually have any real injury, but defeating a floor master without any injury would lessen the authenticity, so we make it like such.

『Oy! Those [Wound-free Pendragon] bunch are injured!?』
『It's true! Even the Shield Princess's shield's been split in two!』

By Shield Princess, do they mean Nana?
However, [Wound-free] is too exaggerated. They just have always been healed before we return to the surface, there is never a case where the members, including the three rear guards, are not injured.

『They couldn't possibly challenge the Floormaster right?』
『No way that can be even for the Pendragon bunch.』
『Yeah, even the [Depth Round Dance] guys who went out in fanfare after gathering several Red Iron bunch got partially destroyed when they tried to hunt the magic core needed to summon the floormaster, let alone the floormaster itself.』

So such a thing happened when I was running around to many places.
We continue to go toward the explorer guild while I vaguely listening to the hustle and bustle around.

『Those two armored children the Black Spear Liza is carrying aren't death right?』
『Ah, since she's carrying them well they're probably alright? Look, they're even waving hands.』

Pochi and Tama who are playing dead wave their hands sociably.
There's no point in their serious injury make-up like this. Well, it's fine.

"Fuhahaha! See this well!"

Arisa whom I'm giving a ride on my shoulder raises the beach ball-sized floormaster's magic core up high, showing it off to the surrounding.
Buzz, buzz, explorers and the townspeople are exchanging words noisily.

Arisa is dressed with bloodied-bandage that looks like an eyepatch on her face, acting like she has some serious injury. She's properly equipped the blond hair wig together with a hood.

"This is!"

Arisa stops at that interval.
The people around who are making buzzes hold their breath together, anticipating the next words.

"This is the Floormaster's, 『Thunder Squid』's Magic Core!"

When Arisa declared so, explosion-like uproar burst out.
She really is someone who likes to show off.

◇

"Geez, you've really gone and done it, defeating the floormaster."
"Yes, although it was thanks to the alliance with these people."

I reported the detail of the subjugation in the guildmaster's office.

Each of the people who act as if they were the party leaders who participated in the subjugation are in this room.
The other members are in my mansion under the pretext of healing their injuries.

"Then, you challenged with 7 group of 72 people, and came back with 15 survivors huh. There are a lot of victims, but this is the shortest record."
"That's because the parties' composition prioritized firepower."

I was slightly surprised about the shortest record, but I made (Poker Face) skill to work hard. For the time being, let's make up some story.

Nevertheless, even though I had properly added the calculated time needed to travel in the labyrinth, and there should have been time loss from when I destroyed the dog-head demon lord, we still got the shortest record huh.

Secretary-san continues the talk while lining up various documents on the desk.

"Then, there are five parties of 15 people, 『Pendragon』, 『Samurai General』, 『Blue Rose』, 『Twin Oni』, and 『Blessing of Great Spirit』 that apply for Mithril Plate, are there not?"
"I will politely decline."
"It's unnecessary for us."
"Same."
"I do not intend to be affiliated with a brat who haven't even lived for 50 years."
"U, umm..."

These masters should have done another rehearsal for their performance. Looks like the contents of the lecture from the party yesterday have all but vanished.

Since Secretary-san seems troubled with the unexpected replies, I send her a lifeboat.

"We will apply for it."
"Y, yes, then, other parties besides 『Pendragon』 will not apply, am I right?"
"Long-winded."
"We'll leave Sir Pendragon to manage the rest."

Looks like the guildmaster and secretary-san have decided to pull back after the masters said so. The guildmaster allowed them to go out of the room.

They probably intend to negotiate with them later.
The guildmaster and secretary-san wished for me to negotiate for them, but I indirectly declined.

They asked me regarding the masters' origin, but I deceived them by saying that I just scouted people who seemed strong outside the labyrinth city so I didn't know the detail.

I was asked to choose one among the treasures, so I selected the [Item Appraisal] orb.

It seems to be a skill that's coveted on the same level as [Item Box] among the treasure orbs.
I'm planning of letting Lulu uses it for appraising ingredients.

◇

The next day, we are made to participate in a parade jointly sponsored by the guildmaster and the viceroy.

Looks like we have to ride on three separate gaudily decorated horse-drawn carriages and parade around the town.
The masters have all gone back to Boruenan Forest yesterday, so it's just our members now.

The very first carriage has me, Arisa and Mia. The second has Pochi, Tama, Liza, and the last in line has Lulu and Nana.
Besides me, the members' composition seem to have been decided in a lottery lot yesterday, but to even have a preliminary lottery draw to decide the drawing turn is too strict. They must have really been looking forward to this parade.

Everyone has dressed up, on top of that they've also equipped the equipments taken from the loot, sprinkling smiles around.
Of course I've also worn a robe more formal than usual, and a gold-braided short mantle that Arisa's picked.

『Arisa-cha~n, look here~』
『Mia-sama, your figure is so beautiful, it dazzles my eyes!』
『Arisa! I'll treat you to some skewers later!』
『Ah, Mia-sama. Your fresh profile today is like a refreshing lily of the valley--』

Oh, Mia is popular. When I commended her, "You're quite popular", she strongly denied, "NO." I might have been unthoughtful. Gonna reflect on it.

Still, I feel sorry for Arisa who get called only by little girls and brats.
I leave it alone since Arisa must also not want to be consoled for it. Arisa has been sending glances to me while muttering, "Another brat huh~", but since there can be time when gentleness is painful, the correct answer should be to ignore her.

Some prostitute-like onee-sans wave at me along the way while calling, "Young master~", so I wave back at them. It goes without saying that Arisa and Mia pinched me from both side.

While being led by [Pendora] children who are swinging a rod that had flower basket on the tip, the parade train entered the venue for the unveiling of the floormaster subjugation.

◇

And then, we safely finished debuting the floormaster subjugation which took two hours.

Although the first subjugation greeting was embarrassing, it was quite painful when I had to listen to celebratory messages from the nobles, the city personages like the Mithril and Red Iron explorers while smiling.
Afterward, Arisa debuted the loot by reciting them in entertainer-like way of speaking, in addition to Mia's musical performance, the excitement of the people doubled, making the tension on the venue increased dangerously.

After all the programs from before have finished, the buffet party on the venue begins.
Various dishes and liquor have been prepared on the stalls on this venue, and they're all free to take.
It seems the cost is burdened by the Explorer Guild--or rather the King himself. I didn't particularly mind paying for it myself, but since it was a custom, I decided to rely on the kindness.

"But hey, is it really alright?"
"What is?"

Arisa talked to me while looking awkward when we were walking to the waiting room of the venue.

"I mean, you've always said that you don't want to stand out right."
"I don't mind. I didn't want to stand out because I was afraid that some strange guy would have an eye on our girls before they could protect themselves."

Right now, they should be able to do something against even an army, as long as there is no poison or powerful trap involved.
I've built enough personal connections too, so if there's someone influential that's hostile to us, I will naturally hear about them, and I can just make use of the enemy of my enemy to quickly eliminate them.

In my case, demon lord flags seemed like it'd be raised if I were to eliminate people who set their eyes on me, so I didn't want to stand out. It would be hard to enjoy the trip if we were being chased by the people around us.
For the same reason, I don't intend to reveal the fact that hero Nanashi is me myself to anyone besides my companions.
I don't want to become like the hero Hayato who's too busy with official businesses he doesn't have time to play.

"However, won't we get pushed with some weird positions from Shiga Kingdom?"
"It's probably alright. Most positions besides the guildmaster's minister, and the general are filled with nobles. Even if they come to invite us, it's probably for a position such as a knight captain or intelligence right? If something like that happens, I'll pull my connections to refuse them so it's fine."

Rather, the possibility of me becoming a chef in royal palace looks way higher.

◇

I carry the presented loot from before to a safe underground while being accompanied by some guild staff.
It's the job of the guild staff and the royal knight to bring them to the royal capital from here on. I've put a marker on the Item Appraisal orb just in case.

"Everyone, thanks for your hard work. I'm going to greet some big-shots on the buffet party now, how about everyone? You can get back and rest on the mansion if you're tired okay?"
"No we won't! I'm going to have a live stage with Mia and the others!"
"Nn."
"Tama is a fascinating dancer~?"
"Pochi is also going to dance spin, spin nodesu!"

The four youth troupe live performance huh.

"That sounds fun. I'll go see it later."
"Nn, promise."
"You have to absolutely come okay?!"
"I'll work hard~"
"We'll make the best stage!"

These energetic four seem fine, but how about other members?

"Master I will go to the orphanage to collect Shiro and Crow."
"I cannot rest in the mansion. Because I have the mission of conquering all the meat on the stalls!"

These two are unchanging.

"Master, I have been asked to perform on the labyrinth monstrous-fish dismantling show, is it alright if I go?"
"Of course it's alright. However, use the normal kitchen knife from the mansion okay."
"Yes!"

Still, the labyrinth monstrous fish only appear in the middle layer, I wonder who hunted it? There shouldn't be enough time between our return to the present, so it might be a leftover item from the viceroy's request.

I walk back to the ground floor of the guild while hearing everyone's plan.

There, we reunited with a nostalgic person.

Part 3 - Reunion (2)

Satou's here. The word *shuraba* is originally about a pathetic scene which involves complication of mad love. Fortunately, that kind of *shuraba* has never entered my life, but the kind of *shuraba* that happens in the clean-up of a crashing project is an everyday occurrence for me. I wonder which one is better...

◇

I had already noticed it from my radar beforehand, but I kept it a secret to make it a surprise for other members.

『Oy, look at that.』
『N, no way.』
『Oh...God....』

I understand their feeling, but the last guy is exaggerating.

『How beautiful....』
『Oh! My beautiful goddess! Have you forgotten--』

I saw that the Great Shield Gell was removed in the middle of his talk beyond the stirred crowd.

"Satouu!"

She flew in the sky from beyond the crowd and appeared before us.
The lobby of the explorer guild has high ceiling so she didn't hit it, but I'm not sure what to think of flying while she's in a dress.

Even while thinking such thing, my line of sight was robbed by two shaking miracles.

"I've come!"

While looking shy in red face, she declares so with folded arms so arrogantly.
I wonder why is this person mistaken in this kind of thing.

"Karina~?"
"Now, let the match begin nanodesu!"

Ah, wait.

Pochi jumps out energetically like there's a 'gyun' sound effect, and Tama also jumps triangularly using the ceiling to assault Lady Karina.

Pochi indiscreetly breaks through the barrier created by the magic creature Raka, and blows through the wall behind together with Lady Karina.
I was able to stop Tama barely in time, but both Pochi and Lady Karina are on the other side

of the wall.

"Oppai-san is sinking. Namu~"
"Pochi great."

Arisa and Mia are being cruel for no reason.

"Karina-dono should be alright. She often played with Pochi and Tama in Muno Castle after all."
"They certainly also played happily in the duchy capital, but she doesn't look too well..."
"She would have been dead if she were a common life-form, so I assert."

Liza doesn't seem to be worried, but Lulu peek through the wall worryingly.
Of course, just as Nana had surmised, if Lady Karina took a serious blow from the current Pochi, she would have died instantly regardless of Raka's protection.

It only ended in her fainting since Pochi was going easy by not using Flickering Movement, and I followed up by immediately using [Magic Hand].
She usually could control her strength, but it seems she was really happy about reuniting with Karina. Yet, I still have to scold her in this regard.

While I'm nursing Lady Karina, both Liza and me scold Pochi together.
The punishment is three days without meat.

◇

"Karina-sama~, where are you~?"

I heard someone searching for Lady Karina beyond the crowd, and there was Erina, the combat maid of Muno Earldom, when I looked there.

"Erina, she's here."
"Ah! Chevalier-sama!"

There is a figure of female soldier behind her I've seen for the first time. I feel like I've seen her somewhere before, but I can't remember. There wasn't someone like her among the baron's maids and the territorial army's soldiers---

--I remember now.

It was the girl who was ran over by the carriage rode by Toruma at Muno city.
Still, I didn't think she would work under Baron Muno after what she had been through.

The other party shouldn't know about me, so I greet her, "Nice to meet you."

"Did Pina not come here?"
"Yes, Pina has been promoted, so it's only me and newbie-chan this time. Taruna looked like she was wanting to go too, but she had been selected to guard the exchange students from

the duchy capital."

Lady Karina seemed to have recovered when we were catching up, she opened her eyes.

"How are you feeling?"
"Sa, Satou, I'm, fine, desuwa."

Even though I've especially looked after her on my lap, lady Karina awkwardly gets up and takes some distance away from me.
Pochi apologizes, "I'm sorry, nanodesu" while looking dejected.

Then, a new intruder appeared.

◇

"Chevalier-sama! Congratulations for your achieve...ment?"
"Thank you, Merian."

Merian, the daughter of Baronet Dyukeli, appeared and congratulated me from the crowd, but it was changed into a question halfway through.
Her eyes shifted to Lady Karina, or rather she focused on her breasts.

After Merian, Princess Mitia and her exclusive maid-san came together. She's also together with a bodyguard-san with scary face of course.

"Satou-dono! Congratulation for your exploit noja!"
"I am honored, your highness Mitia."

Princess Mitia talked to me innocently like usual.
Lady Karina muttered, "Your highness?", beside me.
Erina is whispering, "It's a formidable rival!", to the newbie's ear, but the true formidable one exists at the world tree.

Lady Karina pulled my sleeve from behind like some shy girl, and whispered, "Introduce me."
This is quite rare for this haughty girl. I've always intended to do just that from the beginning of course.

"Your highness, she is the daughter of my master, Karina Muno-sama."
"Oh! To raise Satou-dono as their retainer, your parent must be a very noble-minded statesman! You are also truly beautiful noja! ....Perchance, are you not the fiancee of Satou-dono?"
"N, no--"
"That is not so, your highness."

Since Lady Karina clogged her words, I told Princess Mitia that she was not my fiancee in her stead.
Lady Karina seems discontent about me talking ahead of her, she sends some reproachful glance toward me.

Please don't look at me with such eyes. It is contrary to the fact, so I cannot exactly affirm it right?

"Karina-sama, she is Princess Mitia of Norooku Kingdom--the western leader of the kingdoms union."
"Satou, don't tell me, you!"

I can guess what she wants to say, but please be relieved since I won't make a move to the loli-faced princess Mitia.
Therefore, I corrected it, "That imagination is a misunderstanding", close to her ear.

However, the peanut gallery are being noisy since a while ago.

『Not only he has the Shield Princess, and Jenna, he also hid such a beauty?!』
『Damnit, he wouldn't make Noja princess his mistress right? Right?』
『You, she's still at that age....』

Like always, someone who has almost done lese majeste is mixed among them. No, it would have been out for him if he were heard huh.
Now then, leaving that aside, the favorite is arriving soon.

◇

『The real Explorer Guild is packed after all.』
『You're right Iona-san. It might've been better if we went to the East Guild as advised by the knight.』

I still can't see her behind the crowd.

『Ruu, give me one of those meat skewers too.』
『Ou, awright. Trade with that red skewer.』
『Mou! I was wondering where you two were, so you're buying and eating!』
『I mean, every stall is free. Can't do without eating them.』
『There seems to be some kind of festival, but it's quite lavish for them to have everything free.』
『Un, they say this Chevalier Pendragon subjugated a very strong monster even though he's a noble.』

They're noisy like always.
I saw her sun-colored hair beyond the crowd. Blond color that's brighter than Nana's and Karina's.

『Mou! We have to register as explorers, and greet the staffs--』

Our eyes met.

"Sa, Satou-san!"

She gives her luggage to Lilio like she's throwing it, and then she pushes her way through the crowd, running.
While apologizing to people whom she's almost bumped, her gaze never separates from me.

"Satou-san."
"Yes."

She couldn't stop her momentum, I gently caught her who jumped into my arms.
She's lightly dressed in leather armor, but her softness is in good health.

"Satou-san."

I wait for her who repeats my name.
She looks up from my chest, tears are gathering on the edge of her eyes.

"--I've come."

The word is probably filled with many emotions.
She spins her words with shaking voice.

"Welcome to the Labyrinth City, Zena-san."

Hearing my words, although slightly looking anxious, Zena-san smiles like a flower in full bloom.

I'll patch things up with Lady Karina who complains about the different in treatment later. Pochi and Tama clap Lady Karina's legs, like 'pon', from both side, but there should be no ill-will in that.

It has been awhile.
Zena-san.

Part 4 - Reunion (3)

Satou's here. When you meet old friends in a class reunion, I wonder why do things that happened such a long time ago can be so vividly recalled? I usually can't remember them at all, it's strange.

◇

"When did you arrive at the Labyrinth City?"
"Yes, it was late at night yesterday."

I knew about it of course, but I refrained from accidentally going to the Corps where Zena-san was since it would have made me look like a stalker.
These girls were staying inside their base during the parade so I shouldn't know that they were here.

"Excuuse me. Okay, okay, separate now~"
"Nn, shameless."

Arisa and Mia push themselves between Zena-san and me who were inadvertently talking while hugging, pulling us apart.
Zena-san who noticed that we were hugging parted away while swinging her hand, saying "wa wa wa."

"I, I'm sorry, I was...."
"No no, I'm happy that you're exalted with our reunion."

Zena-san unexpectedly has a passionate side huh. She also hugged me, tackle-like, when I escaped Seryuu city labyrinth back then.

"You two seem to be quite close don't you? Would you introduce her to me?"

Lady Karina puts her hand on my shoulder and grinds it from behind.
When I looked toward Lady Karina, Princess Mitia and even Lulu stared at us curiously.
Huh? Lulu should be acquainted with her though?

"She is someone whom I'm very indebted with during my stay in Seryuu city, one of the magic soldiers of the territorial army, hailing from Chevalier Marientail house, Zena-san."

I've heard her house name once before, but it's the first time I've said it.
I've always only called her Zena-san after all.

The way I introduced her seemed bad, Zena-san's expression got slightly clouded.
Maybe I should have said that she's my friend?

Behind us, the peanut gallery started to buzz about Seryuu city's rumors, like, "The city was safe even though an upper-class demon attacked it", or, "They're ruthless army whose

soldiers even fight wyverns."
It must be quite popular to have many people know about it even though it's a territory located on the opposite side of the kingdom from here.

"Zena-sama. Although you might have forgotten, I am Liza whose life was saved by you in Seryuu city. Owing to that, I am now serve under Master, and have been able to accomplish great feats. I can never thank you enough."
"Thank you~"
"Thank you, nanodesu."

Liza puts her weapon on the ground, kneels, and respectfully bow to Zena-san.
It seems that Pochi and Tama also remember that their life have been saved by Zena-san, they convey their thanks while looking meek.

『Oy, Black Spear Liza let go of her spear!』
『Rather, she saved those three's life huh, just how incredible is she.』
『So the rumor saying the soldier of Seryuu city treats wyverns like they're small fries is really true after all.』
『That girl looks plain, but don't you think she's unexpectedly cute?』

The peanut gallery are fussy.
Should we move to the guild's business room where only Red Iron holders and nobles can use?

"My ability might be lacking, but please order me if you need me for anything. If Master permits, I will rush over immediately."
"Oh no, your words of gratitude are already enough."

Zena-san is at a loss from Liza's sincere words.
Even though dragons are still impossible for the current Liza, she can easily solo something like a wyvern.

"Hey, introduce her to me."

Lady Karina who was unusually sociable today demanded me so.
Someone intruded when I was opening my mouth to introduce Zena-san to Lady Karina.

"Ah! Arisa-chan, why are you still here!"
"Arisa, and Mia, quickly go to the stage. I've asked the intro guys to stretch their part, but they can't keep doing it forever."

Jenna and Iruna of [Beautiful Wings] who are in charge of the stage have come to call Arisa and the others.
Come to think of it, Arisa and Mia said that they were going on stage.

"Uwaah, I forgot."
"Nn."
"Hurry~"

"Oh no nanodesu! Karina, let's go together nodesu! I want you to look at the gallant figures of Pochi and her friends closely nodesu!

Lady Karina is pulled by Pochi and Tama from both sides toward the stage.
She was calling my name even while being pulled so she might have some business with me, but I can just listen to her tonight.
She probably came here thoughtlessly without arranging for the lodging.

"You too Master, please don't keep flirting, come look at the stage!"
"Yeah, I'm going of course."

I replied positively to Arisa who asked to make sure of it, and sent her out by waving hands.
Princess Mitia also said, "I certainly have to listen to Mia-dono's performance!", and then she pulled Merian who seemed to still have something to say toward the stage.

"Master, I declare myself to go collect Shiro and Crow."
"They're probably tired of waiting, you should get them quick."

Nana excused herself and left to the orphanage.
I think Lulu said that she would go back to get the kitchen knife.

"Lulu, when you're going back to fetch the kitchen knife, tell the girls who are house-sitting to prepare the detached room. Karina-sama and her companions probably going to stay there."
"Y, yes."

The preparation for their lodging should be alright with this.

◇

"Sa, Satou-san, umm. She was.... Um--"
"Boy, been awhile~ Were there your mistresses or fiancees among the beauty army just now?"
"There aren't. Incidentally, there is no lover either."

When Zena-san was hesitating over how she should ask, Ms. Lilio asked the question with the crux of the matter like she was sending a life boat.
It was groundless, so I denied it immediately.

Arisa and the others are important to me, but if I have to say, they're more like relatives or family to me.
Lady Karina feels like an annoying junior, or a daughter of my superior. It feels like those demonic breasts would snatch my soul, but I don't intend to yield just yet.
More than anything, Aze-san wasn't present in the group earlier.

Right at then, the rough voice an adult man who can't read the mood cut in.

"Black Spear Liza! I am Kerun the『Knight of White Spear』! I challenge you to a match!"

"Master. May I?"
"Go for it. Don't kill him okay."
"Yes."
"Hahhaa! Now's the only time you can afford to talk big!"

Since bloodshed is forbidden inside the guild, Liza and him went to the temporary arena space in front of the Labyrinth Army fortress.
This arena space has been built because there are usually a lot of people who start having brawls during the height of a festival, and buildings could collapse if they fought carelessly with their high strength.

"Um, Satou-san, is it alright for you not to follow them?"
"Oh it's alright. Liza can defeat him without sustaining any injury."

There's the level difference too, it's probably going to end up a one-side game.
If I were to go see it, Liza would be in high spirit and her opponent might get injured.

◇

After the four of them have finished registering as explorers, we go out of the guild together.
Zena-san and her colleagues are going to meet with her fellow territorial soldiers in front of the west gate to assault the labyrinth in one hour.

It hasn't even been a day since they arrive in the labyrinth city yet they're already going to enter the labyrinth, quite aggressive.
Although I guess we're not one to talk about challenging the labyrinth in the same day of the arrival.

"Have you purchased the provision?"
"Yes, we've been told to prepare only our own equipments since the engineers will be the ones responsible for the provision."

I see, the engineers have it rough since it seems there are 12 people in all.

"Zena-cchi~, we're going to the stalls to recharge our spirits."
"Zena, remember to get some grub besides the love affair."
"Ruu-san, you don't need to speak unnecessary things. Zena-san, just be careful not to be late for the meeting okay."

The three Zena-san's colleagues slipped into the crowd after saying such nosy things.

"Mou! Everyone is like that!"
"Shall we go, Zena-san."
"Y, yes."

I take Zena-san's hand so she won't get lost, and go toward the stage where Arisa and co. are performing.

Since now is immediately after the parade, some unfamiliar explorers and townspeople called me [Young Master].

Some brothel onee-sans also called me, but they practiced their tact when they saw Zena-san beside me, they changed the subject very naturally, saying, "Please visit our establishment at least once."
As expected of employees of high class establishments. Truly tactful interactions.
Let's give them generous tip when I go visiting them with [Pendora] guys.

The venue has seats not only for nobles, but also for us as the leading actors today, but only Lady Karina and her companions, and Nana who are with Shiro and Crow on both her sides are there.
I was going toward there too, but since Arisa's stage had begin, I decided to view them from the general audience's seats.

"The music is wonderful isn't it. I wonder if the light orb behind that girl produces the sound?"
"Yes, it seems to be a fairykin magic called『Instrument Player』. However, the music is wonderful because the skillful players."
"Yes....That's right, I can understand. It's quite wonderful sounds."

Mia who's doing the orchestra alone is certainly amazing, but I can't make light of Arisa who's accompanying her by singing the anime theme song.
While listening to the song, I get myself healed by watching Pochi and Tama who are dancing on the stage by matching to the song. Some shrill voices hang on the venue as the two are flying in the sky in pixie outfit.
When I listen closely, it seems Pochi and Tama are also singing while dancing.
I guess the singing coming from the venue are of the orphanage children?

Arisa who's singing with all her soul doesn't notice me, but it seems Pochi and Tama do, they wave their hands while rotating in the sky.
I wave back at them, which seems to have made them happy, the number of the sky rotations increases.

◇

After Arisa and co. stage is over, I enjoy the festival together with Zena-san by snacking some meat skewers, and potato chips made from Hopping Potato around the stalls. It reminds me of the time when we were going around the stalls in Seryuu city.

Right, since I was introduced to the Seryuu city specialty products by Zena-san back then, let's introduce her to the specialty products here this time.
So I thought, I went to the shopkeeper who was exhibiting dried fruits, but--

"I'm sorry, the date palm is sold out. The load coming from the western part of the continent has been scarce for the last half month."

--unfortunately, it's out of stock.

The shopkeeper-san indiscreetly joked, "The demon lord might have been revived beyond the desert", but I couldn't laugh since it sounded probable.

We watch Lulu's Labyrinth Monstrous Fish Dismantling Show, and enjoy the freshly-made fried fish.
Since the fish was a bit grotesque-looking, Zena-san was hesitating to eat it, but she resolved herself and put it in her mouth after she saw me eating it.

"Delicious!"

Zena-san opens her eyes wide from the shock.

"....Amazing, the taste is so delicate even though it looked like that. It looks like a croquette from the outside, but it's soft and crunchy inside your mouth, it's really tasty. Moreover, it matches so strangely well with this white sauce."

After she's finished chewing it, a faltering impression comes from Zena-san.
The fried fish that she was holding disappeared into her stomach in a blink of an eye.

"Even though she's that young, she's amazing."
"Lulu is the greatest chef in the labyrinth city after all."

I leave behind my praise, "It was delicious", to Lulu and turn over the place to other guests.
Having staggering queue is only natural for food this delicious.

I encourage the little girl maids who are helping Lulu and then escort Zena-san to the west gate.
Unfortunately, we're running out of time.

"Zena-cchi, it'd been alright if you were a little bit late."
"I can't do that since I'm the squad leader."
"Are you seeing her off boy?"
"Yes, and this is a present."

From my bag, I take out a small bag containing several intermediate healing potions and magic recovery potions, and also some all-purpose antidotes made from dragon white stone. The magic potions have ordinary effect since they were compounded by other people.
Zena-san was declining since they were expensive items, but it didn't continue since Iona-san beside her accepted it.

"Have all members gathered? These people are the explorers who are going to guide us this time, Heliona-dono, the daughter of Baron Ketel, and Gina-dono, the daughter of Chevalier Daryl, both from [Moonlight]."

The young knight who appeared to be the captain of Zena-san and her colleagues introduced miss Gina and miss Heriona who are acquainted with me.
According to AR indication, miss Heliona and Captain-shi seem to be related.

Miss Gina noticed me after she was done greeting Zena-san and her colleagues.

"Ch, Chevalier-sama! Please continue the favo--"
"Calm down, Gina. That's the line for wedding. Chevalier Pendragon! I endeavored to catch up to you who was a Red Iron holder, but I wouldn't have dreamed that you would defeat the floormaster and acquire the Mithril Plate! Allow me to selfishly make you my aim from now on too!"
"It is an honor."

I wonder since when did we became rivals?
If I'm not mistaken, I've only ever talked to Ms. Heliona once.

"Chevalier? Pen-dra-go-n?"

Zena-san looks dumbfounded at me with wide eyes without light. Her speech was broken for some reason.
Huh? Haven't I said it?
Come to think of it, the townspeople up until we came here all called me [Young Master].

But, is it really something to be that shocked about?
According to Consul Nina, many people got elevated to the lowest ranked honorary knight in any territory every year.

"Did I not say it? Actually, I have been given the rank of honorary knight from Baron Muno, so I am called Chevalier Pendragon now."
"Eh, then, then the leading actor of this festival was you boy?"
"To be exact, one of the leading actors. There were a lot of people who challenged the floormaster."

To be more correct, the leading actress are our girls only, I'm just a bonus.
Captain-shi who can't read the mood shouts "Then, let us depart!" out loud, and the people of Seryuu Earldom Army begin moving toward the labyrinth gate.

"I will guide you to visit recommended shops when you've gone back from the labyrinth. Would you be willing to hear the full story when that happen?"
"Y, yes. Surely, okay?"

I promise Zena-san who's still not recovered from the shock.
I wanted to go together with her, but Zena-san's standing would fall if an outsider tagged along with her on a military exercise to the labyrinth, so I refrained myself.

The guides are the two people from Moonlight, so they shouldn't go that deep.
Let's confirm her safety with [Clairvoyance] magic once in a while.

I've forgotten to ask their scheduled return, but they probably won't go for several days for their first attempt, I guess I'll reserve some restaurants and bring her there everyday until I depart to the Royal Capital in five days.
During the days she can't go out, I can just let acquaintances who have worked hard like Ms.

Miteruna to go instead.

What awaited me when I came back to the venue was the complaints of Lady Karina who was in the noble seat and got exposed to the curious eyes of the onlookers.
Even though Lady Karina is a beauty, she's not used to people's gazes strangely enough.

Part 5 - Karina's Weapons

Satou's here. I like meat, not as much as the beastkin girls do though. Or rather, besides vegetarians, there should be not a lot of people who aren't fond of meat
This doesn't have anything to do with the above, but there was an illustration of a heroine's silhouette with only the word 'meat' written on it in a light novel I read long ago .
Meat are nice, aren't they.

◇

"Fuh, I feel so refreshed."
"Please wait Karina-sama, I haven't tied the girdle."
"Karina-sama, don't move until after I dry your hairr~"

Lady Karina and her companions who had refreshed themselves on the bathroom in the main building after the long journey entered the room.
She does wear the same bathrobe that we usually use after bathing, but I didn't think that she would enter the living room just wearing that.

Lady Karina is wearing the knee-length robe so the area around her waist is covered, but the breast area is dangerous.
I feel like getting sucked into the deep valley.

Ah, the devil is whispering to my ears. I'm in the same mental state of Adam who was being tempted to reach his hand toward the [Fruit of Knowledge] by the snake--

"Guilty. ■■■■ Darkness"

--The joyous image was cut by Mia's spirit magic.

I won't ever forget the image just now.
Absolutely!

"What? Magic?"
"Shameless."
"That's right, you can't entice him with those cheat weapons."
"Karina-sama, the stimulus from those clothes is a bit too much, so I'm sorry, but please change into this one piece."

Bewildered Lady Karina was getting complaints from Mia and Arisa, and then Lulu followed up.

I cannot see them since they are on the other side of the darkness curtain made by Mia's magic.
Of course I could have seen it if I just used [Clairvoyance] magic, but that would be like peeping, so I restrained myself.

◇

Mia canceled her magic, and then Lady Karina who had her breast area firmly guarded came back to the room.

It seems these girls didn't bring any change of clothes for their journey, they had only prepared the dress Lady Karina was wearing earlier for her.
I feel sorry if they have to change back to dirty clothes after taking a bath, so we've lent them Lulu's and Nana's clothes for today.

It seems to be a bit too tight, I wont' say where though. The clothes are screaming.

"Please bear with those clothes today, I'll call a tailor to make new clothes for you first thing tomorrow morning."
"I still have the dress I've got from before, so I don't need a new one desuwa."

Lady Karina curtly refuses my suggestion.

I don't know if it's because she has just got out of the bath or because of the bathrobe appearance from before, she's blushing in slightly cherry blossom color, it's a bit sexy.

"We have been invited by the viceroy's Madam to a tea party, you can't possibly attend with the same dress right?"
"I will be absent. I'd like you to convey my refusal desuwa."

That can't be accepted, so after some back-and-forth arguments, she agrees to have new armors and weapons to challenge the labyrinth.

And also one other thing.

"We will be departing to the Royal Capital for the Kingdom Conference in five days. A letter jointly signed by Consul Nina and Baron Muno has arrived, instructing me to take Karina-sama along."
"No desuwa!"
"The matter has been decided."
"N.O."

Lady Karina is throwing a tantrum like a child.

"Karina, selfish~?"
"Your right will be scolded if you don't do your duty properly nodesu!"

There come supports from Pochi and Tama, but the content of the persuasion is subtly strange.

"You can go back to the labyrinth city again once the Kingdom Conference is over right."
"But, won't they tell me to go back to the barondom then?"

I personally think that's fine, but returning home five days after arriving from a long journey seems bitter.

"I'll support you when that happens."
"You absolutely will desuwayo!"

I will support you.
I can't ascertain that you will absolutely go back to the Labyrinth City though.

◇

"Meat-san, why are you meat nanodesu?"

Pochi is being melancholic while staring hard at the meat on a picture book.
Was she really that shocked with the meatless dinner earlier.

Even though I, Lulu, and even Mia accompanied Pochi by eating meatless vegetable-only dinner.
Tama's share wasn't without meat, but there were only half of the usual quantity, so she looked a bit painful.

"Pochi, tomorrow--"
"Do you mean! The meat ban is lifted tomorrow nanodesu?!"

Pochi hyper-reacted to my words and said such things, but she really has to introspect herself this time, so I won't be lenient.

"--there's no meat, but I'll make the curry that Pochi loves."
"Dejected~ nanodesu."

Pochi who had a short-lived elation helplessly crumbles on the cushion.
Her favorite curry didn't help to recover her huh.

I pick up the jerky that Tama tried to secretly give to Pochi with [Magic Hand].

"No~?"
"No."
"Tama's feeling is already quite enough nanodesu. Pochi the criminal has to receive her punishment nanodesu."

Pochi looks like she's acting somehow, looking at how she keeps glancing at me, it must be suggested by Arisa, so I ignore it.

◇

After putting everyone to sleep, I move to the Ivy Mansion's underground workshop in order to make equipments for Lady Karina and her companions.
I wanted to investigate the lower layer of the labyrinth tonight, but I postponed it to

tomorrow night since some unexpected jobs came up.

Leriril in her sleep-wear met me and then started to prepare the work bench, but since she was being unsteady and looking sleepy, I returned her to her bedroom.

Oh right, let's check Zena-san's condition in the labyrinth before I start working.

By relying on Zena-san's marker, I peek at her situation in the labyrinth using [Clairvoyance] magic.
Apparently, they're still in the Beetle Area since the dinner time.
I was worried whether they would go to the neighboring Mantis Area, but if they're in Beetle Area, they should be fine since the only dangerous monsters are the Labyrinth Beetle, and the Short Horn Beetle that are around level 20s.
The overflowing Labyrinth Crickets from the Gushing Hole would be dangerous for normal explorers, but since there are two people who can use area attack magic among them, they shouldn't be in any danger. Rather, it's tasty exp.

I begin to work on the equipments after feeling relieved.

First, for Lady Karina, swords are no good.
She couldn't control the blade part well that she was banned to use them by Sir Zotor in Muno Castle after she broke several swords.

Blunt weapons are probably better for her.

I thought of Knuckle Guards and Thorn Gauntlets, but since there are many enemies that are dangerous to fight in close combat in the labyrinth, I ought to make a long weapon.
I also thought of Flails, Maces, and Tonfas, but since she has superhuman strength from Raka, she'd probably better off with a Hammer or something along the line.

Pure Mithril Hammer is fast to swing, and has good power to match, but I can't imagine Lady Karina managing magic power well, so I'll make it from Mithril and Iron alloy.

I'll make one with a small hammer on its tip, and then change it into bigger hammer as her level increases.
I quickly make a casted hammer and then etch it with Baron Muno seal.

I lightly swing it to check the balance.
I made it by referencing the great hammer I had used at the Dwarf Hometown, so it has come out well in just one try. Samples are important really.

Her armor should be good enough with the Hard Newt leather armor, just like Arisa and the others' armor in public. I create the helmet and armor by matching her size which Arisa's measured.
Just in case, I make it so the breast area can be adjusted in three sizes. Since the size that Arisa's measured is different from what I've observed by one or two cup.

I've made Lady Karina's armor to be easy to move with, and also added Knuckle Guards for

close combat after all.
I guess some normal pre-made one-handed swords and round shields are good enough for Erina and the other.

◇

"Ah, the fukufuku smell makes me feel like I'm in heaven nodesu. "
"Fukufuku~"

Pochi and Tama look so happy as they put their nose toward the yakiniku's smell coming from the stalls, I think they're mistaking fukuiku (sweet smelling) with it though.
Even though they've just eaten curry for lunch, it's probably, "There's another stomach for meat."

"Master, reporting my arrival."
"Mornin', masta."
"Good morning, masta."

Nana who've come carrying Shiro and Crow put them down to the ground.
These two call me master, looks like they've been influenced by Nana.

"The pronunciation is different. It's『Mastar』."
"That so? Mastar?"
"Is it Mastar? The pronunciation sounds different than Nana-sama's though..."

Shiro acts its age, but Crow speaks like an adult despite its 1st year primary grader age.
<TLN: Their gender is unknown according to the author.>

"Pochi, Tama. Let's go! Our battles are waiting desuwa!"

Lady Karina who's shouldering a Pole Hammer gazes at the west gate toward the labyrinth with an expression full of fighting spirit.

"Satou! Let me fight you once I get back okay? I'll let you check my body which will have rapidly grown in the labyrinth!"

Lady Karina who's laughing fearlessly speaks something slightly erotic.
The peanut gallery that only heard the half-end is buzzing.

It didn't seem to be a remark with innuendo as Lady Karina pulled Pochi and Tama with her hands toward the west gate triumphantly.

Now then, I had specially came to see them off since I had other business.
I've come to heed the guildmaster's summon, but that granny probably only wants to boast about some rare liquor she's gotten hold of, so I can't be careless.

"Young master."

I heard someone calling me in low voice from the alley next to the guild hall.

A suspiciously swaying slender hand invites from the shadow, and I move my legs toward the alley.

Part 6 - Omen

Satou's here. When I hear the word 'stray child', I remember department stores and amusement parks. The time when a teary-eyed lost child holding his trousers asked me, "Mother, where?", feels nostalgic.
Since my appearance was suspicious due to an all-nighter, I immediately pushed the child to a sales clerk nearby though.

◇

As I go toward the alley where the voice is, a sexy prostitute-like woman with emphasized cleavage is waiting for me there.

"Young master, it has been a long time."

She touches my neck and then leans herself to me coquettishly, making us look like we're having a lovers' talk.

"Mou, please be a bit more embarrassed."
"Forget about that, do you have any new information? Say it quickly."

I urge the woman who's playing her index finger on my chest like she's sulking to press ahead.

The woman is an intelligence agent of the Marquis house.
Due to the matter with Inquisitor Vilas back then, the Marchioness instructed them to tell me about various info.
The information are mainly about nobles who bear ill-will toward me, explorers with bad attitude, and the movement of criminal guilds.
For some reason she doesn't inform me with letters, but by directly telling me while acting as a prostitute or an explorer instead.

"Mou, I've put some effort to look like a prostitute and all, at least gently rub my hair or butt please."
"If you don't have any business, I'll go okay?"

I know that she has some, but we'll be like this forever if I follow her pace, so this kind of attitude and tone are needed.
In short, she's of Arisa's kind, someone who likes young boys.

"I'll do it seriously! First, about the matter with the Fiend Drug--"

In the end, my fear about coup d'etat in the Royal Capital didn't happen, and the one that got regarded and disposed as the mastermind was the subordinate general of Marquis Kelten, instead of the marquis himself as Sir Sokel had told me.

"--the lizard no doubt cut its tail to save himself, but since the the uncle of Sir Sokel, the one

who gave the testimony, was in Duke Oyugock's faction...."

For that reason, Duke Bishtal who hated Duke Oyugock the most, came to protect Marquis Kelten.

Who was Duke Bishtal again?

I check Toruma Memo after a long while since I couldn't remember it. According to it, he's a family member of the Labyrinth Army's general, and a lord of a big territory north of Marquis Eluett territory that's north of the Labyrinth City itself.

In the end, it seems the head of the army that were found managing the fiend drug warehouse was to become the criminal and got disposed of.
It was the one I found when I went to the Royal Capital back then huh.
Who'd have thought that the warehouse of the regular army would unashamedly store illegal items...

"There's more about the fiend drug matter, the seized drug were taken by the Royal Research Institute, but some part of it flowed to the outside--ah, please keep this a secret from other people."
"Ah, of course."

Some of those fiend drug were taken to the Foreign Trade City, and were smuggled away on several ships. The ships' nationality was unknown, but it seems they were heading toward the western part of the continent.

"Fumu, by the way, isn't the later part of the story unnecessary?"

I do have something to do with the Fiend Drug matter, but it was mainly as Kuro, so I think there's no need for Satou to know the particulars.

"No, that's a side issue."
"And the main issue?"
"Yes, do you remember an organization called『Wings of Liberty』?"
"Yeah, they were fanatics who not only kidnapped Sera-sama, but also planned to resurrect the demon lord right?"

I was being vague, but [Wings of Liberty] were the bunch who resurrected the Golden Wild Boar King.
Although, it's unclear whether it was really their intention or they were tricked by the greater demons that acted as their executives.

"Some of the guys who smuggled the Fiend Drug were members of the『Light of Liberty』."
"Light? Wasn't it 'wings'?"
"Yes, [Wings of Liberty] are the extremist group driven out of the [Light of Liberty]."

According to her, it seems [Light of Liberty] has a headquarter in Parion Holy Land located on the west of the continent. To have demon lord believers existing in the country of the

god who summons heroes to exterminate demon lords, what a strange story.

As a sidenote, it seems that there's a similar organization in the royal capital called『Wind of Liberty』.
It seems that there's actually a faction of [Light of Liberty] too here, but they're moderate, or rather, they seem to be just a small-time group which collect forbidden books, and perform immoral ceremonies as they like.
They didn't even have anything to do with the Fiend Drug matter from before at all.

"And?"
"Yes, the remnants of『Wings of Liberty』might possibly get their hands on the fiend drug through『Light of Liberty』, so..."

So she wants to tell me that some [Wings of Liberty] guys who have grudges might use the fiend drug and attack us huh.
I'd have liked if she made it briefer.

She told me that the political situations on the western part of the continent were unstable as the last irrelevant information.
Currently, it's only at the degree of trade closure and small-scale skirmishes, but it seems at the level where war could break out anytime.

Wars between nations should have been difficult to happen during the Demon Lord Season, so why is this happening. I wonder if demons and demon lords are instigating it behind the scene after all?

Apparently, that's the reason why the date palm has stopped being distributed here.
As expected, stopping wars in order to ensure date palm distribution here is 'that', but I wonder if Shiga Kingdom and Saga Empire can stop war by pressures?

I'll try to consult it with the hero who's searching for a demon lord in the Weasel Empire's Labyrinth once he's returned to the surface.
Come to think of it, one of the oracles said that a demon lord would appear in Parion Holy Land too huh. Hero Hayato should have investigated it before he went to the Weasel Empire though....

◇

Arguments between some men and women are resounding from the Guild's entrance.

"Like I said! Gelca isn't the kind of child who would disappear in the middle of a battle!"
"We've reported it to the guild, so we should know immediately if she merely escaped right?"
"Why aren't you going to search for her."
"Even Sosona understands that it's impossible to go into that area without a magician right?"
"I can use earth magic!"
"Without a fire magician, the best we can do is becoming fodders for the monsters. Give it up."

The Leprechaun girl is flaring up to the leader-like warrior, but the leader treats her curtly.
I thought I had seen them from somewhere, they were the guys who were fighting against monsters in the duchy capital during the yellow-skinned demon assault.

I'm not eager enough to deliberately search for her, but since we have somewhat of a connection, I'll at least search for her name when I enter the labyrinth.
By the way, it seems she's not in the labyrinth city.

I passed through the quarreling party, and went to the guildmaster's room.

◇

"Look at this Satou! This luster--enough to make you drool as you imagine the taste right?"

The guildmaster flaunts some transparent high-quality liquor contained in a bottle.
So it's really about this after all....

That bottle should be from the famous liquor brewery in the Royal Capital, the Shiga Sake.
Judging from its cost, it's not a liquor that the guildmaster, whose alcohol bill keeps piling, can afford.
It's most likely a bribe from some merchant.

"Is it good?"
"But of course! Although it's not comparable to your Dragon Spring Liquor, one of this famous sake is enough to sink some Baron-class fortune."

The guildmaster is flaunting the sake bottle bullishly, "Hey hey, ya want it?", but I'm not that desperate to drink it, so I'm not particularly interested. Moreover, I don't think it's only as cheap as sinking baron-class fortune though.
I'm not a child who will speak that out loud though, so I accompany her with, "I'd have loved to taste it."

"Alright! Then it's a banquet tonight! I'll leave it to Chevalier for the liquor snacks!"

The guildmaster gleefully smiled as she pushed me the work to prepare the dishes for the feast.
So that really was her aim. However, I want to check the labyrinth tonight.
If the dog-head demon lord came from the lower layer--or maybe even below--there may be other 30 demon lords after all.

"I'm sorry, I already have a previous engagement tonight. I'm open tomorrow, but I've been invited to a dinner with the Marchioness the day after tomorrow."
"Women again huh? Yer' going to get yourselves stabbed before long y'know?"

How scandalous.
Please stop talking as if philandering is bad. At the very least, I've never played around with amateur women you know?

"By the way, have you called me today just for the drinking bout?"
"Ah.... Of course, it's not the main subject."

I'd like to ask the reason why she was hesitating, but it'd have made our talk longer, so I put it aside.

"Do you know that weapons made from monster material in the labyrinth city have sudden price jumps?"
"Yes, I've heard about it from a familiar weapon store."

I've heard it as Kuro though, but there's no problem with that.
Someone from [Pendora] said that there were a lot of requests for hunting monster material, so the competitions were fierce.

Apparently, merchants outside the city are buying all the magic weapons at twice the market price.
Judging from the intelligence's story earlier, it's probably flowing to the western part of the continent.

"It'd be alright if they gather the material the honest way, but some fools have tried to steal it from inns and houses of explorers."

However, I think there aren't a lot of explorers who leave magic weapons in the inn.
There's probably some guy who make them sleep with drug and then steal the weapons.

"They're aiming for Red Iron-class guys or someone who lives in a big mansion like you, so be careful okay."

This seems flag-like, but I never leave magic weapons in the mansion.
Maybe I should put some dummies?
I should better put some information-gathering Scarecrows just in case.

I confirmed the schedule for the feast with the guildmaster, thanked her for the information and then left the room.

◇

When I left the guild hall, I met a group of metal-armored people with wounds all over their body.
It's probably a party mainly consisting of nobles and knights. Normal explorers don't use these Chain Mails and Plate Mails since the price-performance ratio is bad.

"Boy!"

Oh, it's Lilio.
That means, this group are people from Seryuu City Selected Labyrinth Corps huh.
I didn't notice it since Zena-san's marker wasn't present.

--Huh?

Lilio continues her words as if affirming my unease.

"Zena-cchi has gone missing in the labyrinth!"

Part 7 - The Whereabouts of Zena

Satou's here. There's this saying 'a bolt out of the blue', you don't know when something happen in life. That's why, spend the day enjoyably without regret--that's what my grandfather in the countryside always told me.

◇

Zena-san is missing?
I quickly open the map, and pick not the search bar, but the marker list.

Her current position is--the lower layer of the Labyrinth?
Why is she in such place.

"Zena-cchi might've been kidnapped by a monster! Boy, you have a lot of influences right? I beg you please search for Zena-cchi!"

Lilio grabbed my arms and begged.
Tear lines overflow on her cheeks.

For the time being, Zena-san isn't hurt. Doesn't seem like she's in abnormal state either.
That said, we don't know if it will keep like this, I have to act quick.

"I understand. I'll go look for her."
"Please wait."

Miss Iona beside her catches my shoulder.
Her armors are also broken, her shoulders are bare.

"What is it?"

I want to quickly rescue her.

"Where are you going without knowing the place she's gone missing at and the situation."
"That's..."

Damn, I was too impatient. Was it a bit unnatural.
An excuse. Deception skill, show me your serious mode.

"I'm going to gather people. I know someone who's good with searching magic, so I'm thinking of asking his help. I'll listen to the situation later, so please go ahead to the temple branch to heal yourselves."
"Yes, I understand. Since Zena-san had serious injury before she was kidnapped by the thick fog, please get someone who can heal her too."

Serious injury?

Looking at the map, she's been completely recovered though.

Moreover, [Kidnapped by the thick fog], was there such a monster?

Oops, let's postpone questions for later.

I took Miss Iona's request and left the guild.

◇

I go back to the mansion with cab carriage, and move to the Labyrinth Area 66 with [Return] magic from the basement. I'm glad that I've put a carved seal board there when we were subjugating the floormaster.
I go down to the middle layer from there, and look for the shortest path to the entrance of the lower layer.
Just in case, I've changed into Kuro when I arrived in the Labyrinth.

I contact Arisa with [Telephone] magic while I'm moving.

"Arisa, sorry but could you please suspend the food-sampling, and make the preparation to enter the labyrinth?"
『Okay.』

An immediate answer without even asking the reason, as expected of Arisa.
She's too handsome.

I tell Arisa about the [Disappearance of Zena], and get her to organize a dummy search party.
I'm sorry for Lulu who's doing a special training for the Duchy Capital Cooking Tournament, but I'll be borrowing the three advisors, Liza, Arisa, and Mia for a bit.

While relying on the Hiding skill, I make my way through the labyrinth's passages near the ceiling using Sky Drive in order not to let the explorers who are hunting in the middle layer notice me.
Some winds may be left in my wake, but please overlook that much.

I drilled a hole through a gigantic slime that blocked the way, smashed some carnivorous plant monsters that had grown closely together to become a forest, and repeatedly mowed down steel string nests in the Massacre Spider's area before I came out of the middle layer.
I had also exterminated some large monsters who blocked the way, but it's just trivial things.

I stop at a mysterious metal door on the path that continues to the lower layer.
Apparently it's a sealed door with Riddle.

I immediately knew the way to open the door with [Riddle] skill, but since it seemed that it'd take time to do, I forcefully severed the door using the holy sword Caliburn, opening the way.

Moment time is precious right now.

I wonder how long the spiral staircase beyond the door continues underground.
The radar finally notified that I had entered an unknown area.

I use the [All Map Exploration] after a long while absent, and check the lower layer.

The lower layer of the labyrinth is apparently slightly different than the upper and the middle layer.
If I liken it to plants, imagine there are eight gigantic bump-shaped rhizomes, connected to several hundreds mesh-shaped small rhizomes.
These rhizome parts are what you call 'Area' in the upper and middle layer. The smaller parts are only as small as 1-3 average area, but any one of the eight larger parts is big enough to put the whole Selbira city inside it.

And Zena-san is in the biggest one among those.

◇

I immediately knew the one who kidnapped Zena-san after searching the map, but it's someone I can't be careless with.

A Vampire--in addition, a True Ancestor.

Whats more, it has a skill called [Concentration]. It smells like a unique skill although I don't have any proof.
Moreover, the level is 61. Looking at its skill composition, it's more of a Magic Swordsman than a Magician.
The name displayed on the map is [Ban Helsing]--I can't help but feel that the name is somewhat wrong for a Vampire.
It's plainly the name of a reincarnated person.
I was thinking that it might be a descendant of a reincarnated person, but its detailed information is [Founder of Count Helsing House], so it probably made the house name itself.
There was probably no one who retorted [It's not Van'?].

There is a big castle which occupies almost all of the large area where Zena-san is.
Inside the castle, there are seven Vampire Lords, countless Poltergeists, and 17 human women.
Strangely enough, there is no normal vampire.

Inside the room where Zena-san is located, there are six other women who have been seemingly kidnapped, there's also the woman whom I've heard to have disappeared in the Explorer Guild, Gelca.
The ten people outside this room have the title of [Maids of Perpetual Night Castle], so they're probably people who are working in the castle.

I can break through the front gate just fine, but it'll be troubling if they make Zena-san a hostage, so I've decided to invade it stealthily.

I use earth magic to make a path on the labyrinth wall from the small area directly under the

large area.
I had used the same magic to escape the underground labyrinth in the Duchy Capital back then, but this labyrinth strongly resisted me making the path, thus the work consumed large amount of magic power.

I wanted to come out on the basement of the castle where Zena-san was, but since there were massive quantity of water which seemed to be an underground lake, between us, I avoid it.
I can store the water in my storage, but the structure above would collapse if the water suddenly disappear, the Vampires would notice it, so I decide against it.

Nevertheless, the path-making is complete in 10 minutes, and I've safely invaded the large area where Zena-san is being held.

I slip out of the hole and hide myself in the nearby bush.
I put my head out of it and calmly check the surrounding.

Scenes that fit the word 'Underworld' more than 'Geo Front' spread before my eyes.
I reflexively confirmed my map, but I am still in the labyrinth.

Skeleton Farmers are working on a large vineyard, Marionette-like Living Dolls are harvesting the crops and carry it with awkward movements.

There's an underground lake beyond the field, and a white castle on top of it stands out against the moonlight.
Yes, even though this is underground, there's a moon in the sky illuminating this vast space.
That moon is most likely a magic or a magic tool.

A twisting bridge has been built connecting the shore to the castle.
My Magic Perception skill tells me that there's some kind of barrier on the lake.

I fill the hole I've used to invade with earth magic, and recharge the used magic power from some magic sword just in case.

I want to invade stealthily, but the people in the castle would surely find me if I put my feet on the bridge.
I can also see Gargoyles-like shadows on the lake, and it seems there are monsters underwater too.

Now then, how should I invade this I wonder.
I can of course discuss with the lord of the castle directly to get her returned, but Zena-san's safety is my maximum priority.
They did heal Zena-san who was seriously injured, but although they're probably not evil, they're still vampires after all is said and done. There's a high possibility that they've captured Zena-san and the others to make them work in the field or make them into vampire's brides.

For the time being, I'm going to check the place where Zena-san is with [Clairvoyance]

magic.

--Huh?

It's failed to work, it seems space magic is being restricted here.
Wonder if it's because of the lake barrier?

Since it seems my Map and Radar aren't inhibited, I make Zena-san's marker to be active and her location to appear on the AR reading.
The function is originally used to navigate to NPCs for quests and the like, but it seems it's possible to use it like this.
To be frank, it's too convenient.

Zena-san's marker on the AR reading seems to be moving, wonder if it's just my imagination.
Don't tell me, she's trying to escape herself?

When I check the map, it seems only Zena-san and Miss Gelca that are trying to escape themselves.
On the map, a luminous point appears at the place where they are heading--It's the True Ancestor.
It's probably going to apprehend them.

--There's no time.

I predict the place where the girls will move, and decide to charge straight ahead there.

I take out the Divine Sword from the storage, and run past the lake with Flash Drive in a straight line.
I tear through the barrier along the way with the Divine Sword, penetrating through the opened way.

After leaving the barrier, I put the Divine Sword back into the storage.
I stand still just before the castle wall, and then create wall with [Air Curtain] magic behind me to scatter the squall produced from the Flash Drive.

I place my hands on the castle wall, and use earth magic to create hole in one go toward the passage where Zena-san and the other girl are.
Alright, I can see Zena-san's face.

Since Zena-san has stopped moving while facing toward her destination--she's probably squaring off against the True Ancestor--I appear before Zena-san with Flash Drive, and then I put both girls on my shoulders before they can raise their surprised voices, and use the [Return] magic.

Just before the teleport, the surprised Zena-san hardened her body on my shoulder.

I was worried whether the teleport would be inhibited like with the [Clairvoyance] earlier, but maybe because I had broken the barrier with the Divine Sword, I teleported away

without problem.

It was slightly at the limit, but Mission Complete.

>Title [Rescuer] Acquired
>Title [Fugitive] Acquired

Part 8 - The Whereabouts of Zena (2)

Satou's here. In movies, when you've feel relieved after the panic, the next panic always waits for you. It still surprises you even though you knew about it beforehand isn't it.

◇

After teleporting to the first area of the labyrinth's upper layer, I put down Zena-san and Miss Gelca on my shoulders to the ground.
However, the states of the two look strange--they're stiff hard, unable to move.

I'm sorry to Miss Gelca but I make her wait in the air with [Magic Hand] magic and check the detail of Zena-san's condition.

According to AR, she seems to be in [Restraint(Hold)] state.
Checking on the log, the True Ancestor attacked them, and me, with [Hold Geiss] status attack right before we teleported away.

Quite incredible considering the time I made the hole and teleporting were in only several seconds.
No, I guess I jumped right to the place where Zena-san and Gelca were going to get hit with the attack huh.
I shivered thinking what'd have happened if I didn't have the resistance against it.

Since I didn't get any resistance skill, one of the skills I already had probably worked.
For now, I'll try to see if [Break Magic] could release the abnormal status.

I should talk before that though.

"Calm down. I am here to save you."

Zena-san and Miss Gelca calmed down for a bit.
It seems they haven't talked since awhile ago not because they were being cautious, but because of the [Hold] condition.
[Hold] magic should only make it difficult for you to talk, not disallowing you to talk at all, looks like the effect is a bit different with the vampire's unique skill.

"We've escaped from the vampire's castle. I will release you two from the abnormal status. Relax and wait."

I tell the two so and use [Break Magic].
I felt slight resistance, but I could cancel it without any problem.

"I have to ask just in case, are you the one called Gelca?"
"Yes, it's me."
"I see, I've come to save you by the request of a girl called Sosona. There is no problem of me saving the girl over there as well right?"

I make it to look like I saved Zena-san incidentally together with Miss Gelca.
I'm sorry for Sosona, but I'll use her as an excuse in place of the reward for saving her friend.

I urged the two to hurry with the escape after coolly replied their thanks.
I'd feel bad for Lilio and the others who are worrying her if we're too slow.

Right, I'll give Zena-san and her companion the weapons for self-defense.
There are only demi-goblins on the way to the exit from here, but I'll use this good chance to give Zena-san a magic weapon and a high performance wand.

"This is the first area of the labyrinth's upper layer. I'll escort you two until the big hall before the exit. Use these to protect yourself."
"It's a simple but beautiful dagger.... Is this possibly made of mithril?"
"It is not of pure mithril. It's just mithril alloy, so do not mind it."

Miss Gelca who seemed to have noticed the dagger's material was at a loss of word as she asked me.
While answering her suitably, I pass a short sword to Zena-san.
This one is also a mass produced casted magic sword being sold by Echigoya.

"It's amazingly sharp.... I can feel stronger power than the magic sword Captain Derio had."
"Use this sword belt. You cannot put your sword with that clothes."

I take out a stylish sword belt that was made to be sold to nobles and push it toward Zena-san who's looking at the 10cm-long blade she's pulled out of the sheath.
The girls cannot wear the sword without a sword belt since they're wearing thin dress and delicate pumps.

"Um~, could you please give us a wand too if possible? We are magicians. We'd be happier to have a wand rather than a sword for self-protection."
"Very well, use these."

Since I had planned to give them one in the first place, I take out long wands out with [Item Box] and give it to them.
I've made these wands from the old evergreen oak of Boruenan Forest, it's capable of limiting magic loss during magic converging and invoking.
It's fit to be used for continuous battles in the labyrinth and bombardment.

I originally planned to give the wand to Arisa, but since I got ahold of a lot of world tree's branches, the plan was shelved.

Miss Gelca immediately use reinforcement magic on herself and ascertain the long wand.

"Oh, this is some amazing stuff! My magic is streaming smoothly to the point of being scary."
"....It's true. Moreover, the magic power's consumption has been greatly diminished."

Zena-san used [<<Wind Protection>>] on everyone including me, and muttered her

impression.

I'm glad that they like it.
It's better than letting the wands become fertilizers for my storage.
The creator's name is blank (nanashi/nameless) anyway, they shouldn't suspect the maker.

We advance the passages toward the exit.
We meet some girls and boys who were fighting some demi-goblins, so I ask them to escort Zena-san and Miss Gelca to the exit.

"Please guide these girls to the entrance. I will give you rewards of course."
"Kuh, at least until our fight is over--please wait."

A boy wearing blue mantle politely replied while he was fighting against the goblin.
They seem to be graduates of [Pendora] but I'm not familiar with their face.
Still, having a hard fight against some demi-goblin, how shameful.

They came to us after they've defeated the demi-goblins in a few minutes without injury.

"Tsk, the dagger of this thing is only dirtied with blood."
"What, it wasn't a poison huh."

The boys are having such conversations while illuminating the shaved bone dagger which the demi-goblin held.

"Recently, there are some demi-goblins that use poisonous dagger around."

I see, so they have to fight while being careful from getting hit huh.
The leader-like boy told me so even though I didn't ask.

"Sorry but guide these girls to the entrance. This is your reward."

I tell them unilaterally, and pass a small bag with several gold coins inside to the leader.

"Understood. We can just escort them until the great staircase right?"
"Ah, I'm counting on you."

He received the small bag while it's letting out clang sounds, and agreed to escort them after confirming the inside.
The exit is just 30 minutes away, so he probably thinks that it's good for some extra money.

"Farewell then. Give my best regards to Sosona-dono."
"Umm, please tell me your name."
"I am not one to give my name."

....What am I even saying.
Well I could give Kuro name, but I returned to the mansion with [Return] magic after hiding myself in the passage's darkness.

◇

"Ah! Boy! Here!"

I found Lilio and the members of [Moonlight] gathering in front of the guild when I came there with Arisa and the others.
They are also with other members of the Seryuu Selected Corps who have been healed of course.
As expected they didn't have enough time repair their equipments, so the damages on their armors remain.

Zena-san and Miss Gelca have started advancing through the [Passage of Death] before the labyrinth's gate when I was greeting the selected labyrinth corps' captain, Sir Henz.
When they have come near the west gate, I suitably close our conversations and walk toward the west gate to meet Zena-san.

"Ze, Zena-cchiii!"
"Lilio! I'm back."

Lilio jumps to Zena-san who comes out of the west gate when she saw her.
Slightly after her, Miss Iona and Miss Ruu also congratulate her safety.

"Zena-san, I'm glad that you're safe."
"Satou-san!"

Even while being hugged by the three girls, Zena-san extends her hand between the gap, and I grip her white hand to congratulate her safe return.
Arisa and Mia lightly kick me from behind though, please stop getting jealous during reunion.

◇

It seems Zena-san and Miss Gelca couldn't talk about the vampires due to the [Contract] skill, so they reported to the guild that they were kidnapped, confined and then, saved by a mysterious person.
The mysterious person was immediately judged as Kuro once they described the appearance. Due to that, it's decided that the one who had kidnapped Zena-san were to be the Lost Thieves.

I guess I can just talk about the vampires to the guildmaster as Kuro later.

Zena-san and the others are not going to enter the labyrinth for the next few days to repair their equipments and they're going to have as much rest as possible today after we have promised to eat some meal together tomorrow.

By the way, the reason why the Selected Corps were devastated was not because of the vampires but because some Soldier Mantis came out of the gushing hole and linked when they were fighting some Beetles so it became a fierce battle.
At that time, Zena-san was immediately kidnapped by the thick fog once she sustained a

serious injury.
I heard later that Miss Gelca was also kidnapped by the thick fog when she was dying after getting attacked by an Assassin Shadow Goblin.

I wanted to ask for more details, but since Lady Karina appeared from the west gate while looking like a corpse behind Nana, I was forced to suspend it.
Apparently, she was being put on the [<<Floating Board>>] made with Nana's force arte.
Not only Lady Karina, Erina and the others, and Kuro and Shiro are also being carried while looking dead tired.
They probably fall down from the sudden level up.

"Master, reporting our return."
"I'm bacck~?"
"I'm back nanodesu!"
"Welcome back. Are Karina-sama and the others having level up sickness?"
"Yes, so I affirm."

Looking at the AR indicators, Lady Karina has leveled up by 3, while Shiro and Kuro have gone from level 1 to level 7.

What kind of wild training did they do.

I have to tell them to hold back a bit during the labyrinth training tomorrow since she has to come to the tea party and the banquet with me the day after tomorrow.

◇

And then, the night of that day, I went back to the labyrinth after comforting Pochi who was feeling down from the meatless kid's lunch.

Yes, in order to meet the aforementioned True Ancestor who might be a reincarnated person.

Part 9 - Vampires (1)

Satou's here. Equaling demon lords, there are many stories and games that have vampires as the last boss, however aren't them not good to play the role as a villain with such varying weaknesses?
Sunlight, garlic, can't cross running water, can't enter into a building without being invited first, they have array of weaknesses, as such stories usually depict them being defeated with just wisdom and courage without relying on heroes.

◇

After returning to the lower layer, I've decided to examine the lower layer a bit more before I go to the vampires.

I haven't examined it in details since I was focused in saving Zena-san before, so I'm going to investigate it now.

There are around 30 beings that are level 50 and above in the lower layer.

The highest-leveled one is the Elder Root at level 99 that exist in the second largest area. It seems to be a plant-type monster that extends to the entirety of the large area.
Its level is about the same as the Great Monstrous Fish (Tovkezeera), but it doesn't seem to be the Floormaster.
I tried to search for Floormaster just in case, but it didn't seem to exist.

The second highest one is an Evil LesserDragon at level 80.
It's a lesser dragon even though its level is higher than the Black Dragon Heiron.
I wonder what is the basis for differentiating whether a dragon is lesser or not?

Let's ask Heiron about it next time.
He probably would answer, "Dunno", but since there's no one else I could ask, it can't be helped.

The third highest one is [King Mummy] at level 72. On top of having unique-skill sounding skills like [Metal Creation], and [Fantasy Factory], this King Mummy's name is [Tetsuo].
He must be a reincarnated person like the True Ancestor.
I'll try seeing him after meeting the True Ancestor.

And then there's also the somewhat lower-leveled one at level 53 called [Iron Stalker].
He also has some ominous and unique-skill sounding skill called, [Spirit Possession]. Since his name is [Takeru], the possibility is high for him to be a reincarnated person.
His race is Living Armor, he probably uses [Spirit Possession] to make a metal armor become his body.
If Arisa hears about this, she would likely try to coax him to "Say『Nii-san』."
<TLN: I hope you know where this reference comes from. ;)>

These two reincarnated people (assumption) are each positioned on two neighboring large

Areas.
They're probably close friends.

◇

Some guardians have been placed in front of the gate before the path that connects to the area where the vampires are.

『Show me your power if ye wish to cross this gate』
『Show me your wisdom if ye wish to cross this gate』
『Swords and Magic, retrace your steps if ye do not posses both』

Three mouths engraved on the gate are speaking words like living things.

As for the guardians, there are two large golems that are bigger than 9 meters, and a semi-transparent Wraith.
The golems are a skeleton-like Bone Golem and a robot-like steel-made Iron Golem.

The Iron Golem has a cannon and an axe-like weapons, while the Bone Golem has two short swords, a mace and a round shield on its four arms. Although I said short swords, that's only relative to the nine-meter big golem, from my perspective it's pretty much a thick great sword.

I guess annihilating them would be bad if I'm going to have a talk with the vampires.

Without caring for me who had been lost in thought, the Iron Golem began its attack.
The Iron Golem shoots out a flaming ball from its cannon.

Using the [Break Magic] is troublesome, so I flick the flaming ball with my hands, changing its course.
The out-of-course flaming ball made a big explosion on the passage wall behind me.

With that as the signal, the Wraith has begun chanting [Ice Paralyze], and the Bone Golem started to dance with two weapons on its arms.
With small motions, I take some light steps to dodge the furious assaults from both sides, and then I lightly touch it with my palms by matching the timing of its attacks.
Right at that moment, I drain its magic power with [Mana Drain] in one go to make it unable to act anymore.

The Bone Golem which has lost its magic power breaks down to the ground as if it's been attacked with Turn Undead.

I capture the scattered bones of the Bone Golem with the magic-sealing ropes and wires I've made from Thorn Foot in the mansion in order to prevent it from returning to battle.
Of course I didn't do it manually, I used [Magic Hand] magic.

Ignoring the Wraith's chant, I go toward the golem which is setting up its cannon to neutralize it.

Even if I'm paralyzed, I could release it by using [Break Magic] chantlessly, so that one is for the last.

It seems there's a time lag before the Iron Golem can use the cannon again, it's attacking me with the axe part, but since its movement is slow, I lightly dodge it without even using the Ground Shrink, and then I neutralize it with [Mana Drain] like with the Bone Golem.
I tie its right leg and its left arm behind its back with magic-sealing rope, restraining it.

I direct a jumping kick toward the Wraith while seeing the log informing successful resist against the paralyze at the edge of my view.

It seems the Wraith has a special characteristic of invalidating physical attacks, it's waiting my kick while looking calm.
Wraiths have an atrocious skill called [Life Drain], so from its point of view, I probably look like [A moth flying into the flame].

The moment I touch the Wraith, I generate magic edge on the spikes on the sole of my shoe, kicking it away.
Of course, I didn't forget to hold back so it wouldn't be defeated in one blow.

It seems to be quite painful as the Wraith that has been kicked away runs away toward the graveyard beyond the gate while screaming like it's startled.

Wraiths that are weak to pain, how rare.
Do they even feel pain in the first place?

No one answers such a question of mine as the gate simply opens silently.

>[Life Drain (Drain) Resistance] Skill Acquired

◇

Since they don't come to meet me, I decide to enter at my own discretion.

My appearance today is the custom version of Kuro set with a different disguise mask.

I could go as the normal Kuro, but since I'm going to meet a reincarnated person who call itself as a famous vampire hunter, Ban Helsing--although the true name should be Van Helsing--, it's probably better if the face is of a Japanese person instead of a foreigner, so I've made a new disguise mask.
<TLN: TL Error, the vampire's name is 'Ban Helsing', thus why Satou retorted 'why isn't it Van?', back in ch. Part 7 - Revised.>
I'm borrowing the face of the outsourced debug staff, Tanaka-shi. The face of Mr. Metabolic doesn't match my body build, so I've chosen the face that's hard to left an impression with.

Two female Vampire Lords are waiting for me near the bridge that connects the castle on the lake.
They're lords even though they're women huh. I'd like to ask the person who gives the name, why isn't it 'Lady'.
There's no helping it even if I complain since it's their race name, but since it's too retort-

prone, I'm going to call them Vampire Princess at my own discretion.

The two Vampire Princess are a short childish girl, and a tall adult beauty.
The childish-san is a 300 years old level 49 girl with white hair and blue eyes, and the glamorous beauty with blond hair and pale blue eyes is a 100 years old level 41 woman. The discrepancy between their age and their outer appearance is just like the vampires in fictions.

During the occasion, I activate the [Life Drain Resistance] I've got just now to the maximum.

"Welcome, strong one."
"Are you seeking a fight? Or the treasure sphere of knowledge and moonlight grass?"
"My wish is to meet the True Ancestor-dono."

I answered plainly to the two vampire princess who was asking my purpose.
I'm not role-playing Kuro's way of speaking this time.

"Is that so.... You don't want to fight do you...."

The beauty is disappointed for some reason.
Did she want to fight?

The childish Vampire Princess tells me [Wait a bit], changes one of its hand into a bat, and then sends it to the castle.
How convenient (fantasy).

I had a chat with the two since we were free during the wait.
The little girl didn't reply while looking disappointed, but the beauty normally talked with me as she seemed to be amiable.

That said, since we didn't have a common topic, I asked questions about the odd spectacles around us like 'how do the grapes bear fruit with only moonlight'.

Apparently, that seems to be a plant-type monster called Dusk Grape. Just as the name implies, it can only grow in darkness, and will wither if it's basked in sunlight.
Only Skeletons and Living Dolls can handle them since they're carnivorous.
I see, they can eat their farmers huh.... To think that the crops are underworld-style too....

It seems the Vampire Princesses don't need to eat meal, they're only growing it as indulgent food.

I was glad the she taught me various things, but it was troubling how she asked for a fight at random, "I'll give it to you if you can win against me", whenever I got interested with some of the odd things.
I'm not going to deem that vampires are all Battle Junkies by only looking at her, but please stop those sparkling eyes wanting to fight.

When we were having such chats, the bat came back and returned into the little girl's hand.

"It seems Master will meet you. Follow me."

The little girl bluntly said so, turned her body toward the castle without even waiting for my reply, and then began to walk.

Part 10 - Vampires (2)

Satou's here. I think the saying [Noblesse Oblige] is from France, but I wonder when was it got popularized.
I've only ever seen the words in manga or anime in Japan, but it seems to be a relatively common deed in another world.

◇

"That stand-up collar, black hair and eyes, and that name. And above all, that face!『Are ye a Japanese?』"
『That's right. Just as you can see, I was born and raised in Japan.』
"It is so dearuka."

Since the latter part was said in Japanese language, I also replied back in one.
The True Ancestor before me is a young man with seaweed-like naturally curly violet hair.

Even though his skin is pale-white and his face looks like a Frenchman, his accents when he was speaking Japanese was in Kansai dialect.
No, I guess his current appearance has nothing to do with his previous one.
Maybe the name Ban (「番」) was from the kanji「播」?

"You don't seem to be a hero of Saga Empire, are you a <Lost One> who has been spirited away dearuka?"
"I'm not familiar with that <Lost One> term, but I'm probably one of those so-called teleported people."
"Hou? Several hundreds years ago, the holy kingdom Hellon imitated the Saga Empire's hero-summoning ritual, and summoned heroes from Japan, so another kingdom is repeating the same thing again huh..."

He mutters some dangerous things like, "Kidnapper bastards", and, "Should I get rid of the summoner and the kingdom's central figures again" with a grim face.
From his perspective, teleported person=summoned person huh.

The True Ancestor is level 61, but if he leads the level 40-50 Vampire Princesses, they can destroy some small kingdom easily.
Most of all, as far as I know, there is no kingdom called Holy Kingdom Hellon in this continent.

Let's do something about it for Princess Menea's sake.

"There is no need to do that. It seems they were already attacked by a Greater Demon, and the summoners, including the people involved had already been eliminated."
"Even demons do some good thing sometimes dearuna."

I tell the True Ancestor the thing Princess Menea has told me.
Although I don't know whether it's true or not, there was probably no point for the princess

to lie at that time, so there's no need for me to excessively doubt it.

"I would like to talk about various Japanese things, but you would be better off finishing your business first dearu."
"Right. My business is--"

After apologizing for destroying the barrier and the castle during my rescue, I asked him to release the women who were with Zena-san.

"Those women are people whom I've legally bought as slaves dearu."
"I can pay the compensation if you want?"
"I am not troubled with money dearu."

--Not possible huh.

"By buying legally, don't tell me you went to the city?"
"Certainly not, dearu. A secret market opens in the upper layer of the labyrinth once every two months. There, I bought the exhibited slaves with the money made from selling magic cores and monster materials dearu."

Moreover, he seems to be a regular customer there, they even brought expensive slaves that only him would buy.

"Are you keeping the slaves as the source of blood supply?"
"Watch your tongue dearu. Those women are important servants of the castle. I will have your retract the 'keep' part."
<TLN: The 'keep' here is like for 'keeping pets'.>
"Excuse me, I withdraw my words earlier."

I purposely tried to provoke him, but he denied it unexpectedly fierce.

"I ask the slaves I've bought to provide several dozens cc of blood every month, but other than that I only have them work as maids in the castle. I do not turn them into vampires against their will, nor I do cruel or sexual violence against them."

I feel that I'm not wrong about them being blood supplies, but it seems the vampires don't take away the women's free will.

It seems his normal sexual desire has gradually disappeared ever since he became a vampire.
All the vampire princesses seem to be his wives, but their relationship only goes as far as hugging and exchanging kisses.

His only desire is to drink a cupful of wine with a droplet of blood three times day, it's a bit different than the image of vampires I have in mind.
How do I say this, he's the kind of vampire that appears in the woman-oriented stories and novels.

"I will free those who wish for it in 5-10 years, but since I provide them education and skills,

and also living expenses enough to play around for years during the period of their employment, the slaves choose for themselves whether they want to be freed."

With all those hospitalities, there's probably a lot of people who want to work under him even though he's a vampire.

The vampires give education and skills to the slaves partly for their self-reliance after they've been freed, but it's mainly a way for the vampire princesses to spend their free time. The purpose seems more vampire-like than charity.

However, they can't get sunlight here, they'll likely become ill if they're here for 10 years.

"That worry is unnecessary dearu. There is a hermitage of a light elemental magician at the end of this big area. I have ordered the maids to sunbathe there once a day."
"A light elemental magician in the domain of vampires?"
"It is of a man and his daughter and her husband who have ran away to the labyrinth after getting victimized by a stupid son of a grand noble who tried to rape his daughter. I provide them with food and necessities in exchange for their works dearu."

I see.

I feel that he's a bit too considerate to the slaves, but he also has his own reason for that.

"A hero will come here if we recklessly abuse and slaughter them. Co-existence and co-prosperity are good in moderation."

The True Ancestor boasted so while smiling pretense of evil.

◇

"However, there's no need to abduct Miss Gelca and the others if you buy your slaves right?"
"Umu, there is no need."
"Then, why?"
"The black market didn't open this month, when I was going to see the the lost thieves who are the market's boss, I caught sight of some dying girls."

According to the True Ancestor, Gelca couldn't move since she was stabbed with a poisonous dagger, and going to be eaten by monsters, while Zena-san was dying after getting hit by a Soldier Mantis's attack, he saved each of them.

The poison and bleeding would stop when they became mist together with a vampire, so he brought them to this castle and healed them with the magic potions stocked here.
I'm interested with just how is the [Became mist] part possible, but let's quench the curiosity later.

"Are you doing charity for your pastime?"
"Fumu, the greatest enemy of living a long life is boredom dearu. I decided to help someone

who had a bad luck before me on whim. And when they are beautiful girls, is there any reason not to help them?"
"Indeed."

Though, it seems he only ever came to the black market whenever he went out of the lower layer, so him bringing someone to the castle to save them like with Zena-san happened for the first time after a century.

◇

I thanked the kind True Ancestor for saving Miss Gelca's and Zena-san's life, and asked him if he wanted anything from the surface as the reward.

"Umu, I'd like to drink some『Blood of Lesseu』dearu."

I thought that he would say that he didn't need anything, but he unexpectedly replied immediately.
If my memory serves me correctly, it should be the name of a cheap wine brand.

"Quite an unusual wine of choice. I have Item Box and Teleportation, so I can provide fresh foodstuff and cloth you know?"

The True Ancestor looks at the Vampire Princesses who are waiting upon him nearby.

"Fashionable dresses."
"Mithril, or if there isn't any, iron or silver ingot."
"Cute accessories."
"I want paper and ink."

I wrote the items that each of the vampire princesses told in the companion column's memo.
Except for the [Blood of Lesseu], they were all items that I already had in the storage.
I can hand it over immediately, but it's probably better to do it together with the True Ancestor's wine. After confirming the item by reading the memo out loud, I make a promise of the time I visit here again.

The True Ancestor stopped me when I was going to leave.

"Since you've already come here and all, why don't we have a match."

◇

It was a close battle at the beginning, but the match with the True Ancestor is ending with my complete victory.

"Checkmate."
"Wait, don't do that move."
"But, didn't you say that the『Wait』earlier was the last?"

"Gunununu. Then I'll give you three Blood Spheres, please wait for it again dearu."
"Okay, this is the last y'know?"
"Umu."

Yes, the match is for Shogi.
The match began with the Shogi board that the True Ancestor had prepared, but his skill is only at the level of someone who's crazy at but not good at it.
Doing the wait is okay since I'm getting rare materials of vampire-san for it, but playing Shogi with him is accumulating me some stress.

I'm relatively strong for a beginner (Shogi player) since I was given some devilish training by Mr. Metabo during the meeting for the making of Shogi app for my work.
Moreover, since the app has several difficulty level, I'm well-informed with the way to skilfully hold back, yet right now it's next to impossible for the True Ancestor to win this match.

Even if I plainly make an opening, he would make a move that can't be said to be anything but suicidal.
No matter how much he relies on [Wait], his chance of victory is thin.

Although, the vampire princesses who are watching the match don't seem to care about the outcome.
Whenever the True Ancestor calls for [Wait] like a child, groaning while looking vexed, the girls look at him adorably with eyes full of affection.

Well, let's not find faults on someone else's hobby.
The Shogi showdown with him continued until near dawn, when a certain person visited.

Part 11 - Vampires (3)

Satou's here. In horror movies, there are scenes where a head without body laughs maniacally, or with someone who doesn't die even if there's only their head left while it's cursing in resentment.
I can't help but wonder just how are they making voices without a throat and lungs.

◇

"I've come to beat you! Ban-sama!"
"Semeri, you're energetic today too."

A beautiful woman riding a giant scorpion followed by a Tyranosaurus, and a Roper, which has ivies as its limbs, confront the True Ancestor in the castle's courtyard.
<TLN: Roper >
Her pale body entwined by her wavy black hair is quite captivating.
The woman is one of the True Ancestor Ban's Vampire Princesses, a Vampire Lord. The giant scorpion and the monsters accompanying her have also been turned into vampires like her.

I asked Ban since I found it strange for his subordinate to come attacking him, but he reply in carefree manner, "She's in her rebellious phase nanodearu."
It's probably a part of entertainment for him.

Moreover, Semeri who's come to defeat the True Ancestor has her pale body dyed in violet color.
Contrary to her word, her eyes are those of a girl in love.

"Now then, who are going to be the vanguard today?"
"Ban-sama, me!"
"No, let me do this."
"I want to do~ it."

Not only the blond haired beauty from before, the red-haired and the black-haired women also applied.
Apparently, she's not the only battle maniac around.

"My turn."

The white-haired taciturn little girl Vampire Princess who has been silent since a while ago raises her hand quietly and goes to the courtyard.

The little girl cuts her wrist with the fingernail that's extended from her small finger.
The blood spouting out of the wrist moves like an animal, forming a scythe.

....It's very like vampire, or rather template-like, it's truly a fantasy spectacle.
As for Semeri, she puts a great sword made of monster material on her shoulder.

"Fuhn, wouldn't have thought the white princess to be the vanguard? I thought the fat blond

over there would be the one."
"I-I'm not fat! I'm only a tiiny bit plump!"

Semeri called the glamorous blond-san fat, but even though I don't think she's thin, she doesn't look fat at all either.
The little girl who's arrived at the courtyard pushes her scythe toward Semeri as if she doesn't hear the two's bickering.

"My vanguard is Tyranon. Go, Tyranon!"

I felt slight affinity with Semeri's questionable naming sense.

The little girl jumps to the Tyrano which swings its tail with one leg as the pivot.
The six-meter big Tyranosaurus is comparatively agile for its size.

The little girl easily cuts the Tyrano's tail with her scythe.
However, the Tyranosaurus seems to have assumed that the tail would be cut from the beginning.

The blood spouting out of the cut part of the Tyrano's tail suddenly burst into flames for some reason.
Just as the flaming blood that's spraying like flamethrower about to engulf her body, the little girl turns into mist to evade it.
However, it looks like they've grasped vampire's ability well, the spraying blood seems to be have the special characteristic of burning the body of a vampire that has turned into mist.
The other vampire princesses who are watching the game hold their breath, while Semeri is smiling.

"....Naive dearu."

The True Ancestor muttered.

Even according to my AR indication, the little girl is only slightly damaged.
The little girl emerges from the shadow under the Tyrano and quickly cuts both its legs.

Apparently, the mist was a fake, the real body had merged into shadow.
It's not a shadow magic, but a race-specific skill called [Shadow Walk]. Only few people posses it, including the little girl and the True Ancestor.
It seems to be a skill that only vampires who have aged past certain years posses, the 170 years old Semeri doesn't have it.

The Tyrano which has lost its mean to escape is cut into pieces without any resistance.
Apparently, vampires turn into ash when their HP becomes zero.

"Winner, White Princess Ryuna."

The taciturn little girl grips her small fist, secretly looking happy.
The girl gracefully walks toward the True Ancestor, and then presents her cheek toward him.

When the True Ancesotr lightly kisses her cheek, she smiles broadly.

It's rather cute.

◇

"The second one is, Roper! White princess can't fight again okay?"

When the little girl who was still smiling was going to walk toward the courtyard, Semeri stopped her in irritated tone.
The little girl turned toward the True Ancestor to be the judge.

"Umu, one-side game isn't fun dearu."

With those brief words, the second round is a fight between Roper vs the blond beauty.
Just like the little girl, the blond beauty cuts her own wrist and create two short swords from her blood before going to the battle.

The beauty evades the randomly-attacking tentacles with speed that surpass humans, while warding off the ones that she can't evade with her short swords.
Unlike with the Tyrano, the sap of this roper doesn't seem to burn.
However, it seems it has strong viscosity as the blond beauty's movement is getting dull.

The nail-like cornified parts at the tip of the roper's tentacles are tearing the beauty's clothes.

"Ahahaha! Good good Roper! Expose that fatty's shameful body under the broad moonlight."
"I, am, not, fat."

The blond beauty's breath seems to have been thrown out of order after arguing with Semeri, she's finally unable to dodge and caught by several tentacles, she's lifted on the air with her limbs tied.

--quite an erotic pose.
For her honor, I shift my glance behind.

I could hear crackles like from electricity from behind.
The blond beauty is affected with paralyzed status, it seems she's taken electric attacks from the tips of the tentacles.

It seems she can't turn into mist in this state, her defeat is decided without even a counterattack.

"Game over, winner Roper."

I turn around since it's ended--Oh my, it's a splatter.... the corpse of the blond beauty which has been split in two are dangling on the Roper's tentacles.

The blond beauty's head which has been thrown by the Roper is picked by the little girl.

"Unsightly."
"....Regrettably."

Geh, as expected of vampires.
She can talk even with only her head.

"Do not worry. She will be immediately revived if she takes some blood dearu."

The True Ancestor followed-up when I was shocked to see the freshly-severed head talking.
Confirming on the AR indication, her health gauge is gradually being restored.

◇

"Roper is going to fight again. It's the leader's turn over there!"

Semeri looks toward the True Ancestor.
The True Ancestor looks at me as if she didn't notice her gaze.

"Routine works cause laziness dearu. Let's change the plan today. Kuro-dono, would you show us the techniques you use to defeat the guardians?"
"Yeah alright."

I don't mind since I can just tie the Roper with [Magic Hand] and defeat it in one blow with fire magic.

"This Roper is a special kind for Ban-sama. Like I'd use it against a human! I'll torment him directly."

....Didn't you just use it against the blond beauty.
And also, I'm afraid to ask just what kind of things is she going to use it for.

"I prefer not to injure her, is there any tip to hold back?"
"You human, hold back you said?! You underestimate this Semeri-sama."
"Don't worry dearu. Vampire Lords won't perish even if they turn into ash."

I consulted True Ancestor in whisper, but it seemed vampire princesses had good ears as Semeri heard it, she was enraged to the point of looking like her blood vessel would rupture.
The True Ancestor gleefully said, "She would be revived immediately if you put a magic core on top of the ash and drip some blood, so I don't mind if you go all out dearu.", as if fanning the situation.
The castle maids would become victims if I do it seriously you know.

They won't die even if you cut their head, I guess I'll end it by doing that.

"Ban-sama! The term won't change even if I beat this guy y'know?"
"Ah, if Semeri won, I would be your captive until next month as promised. However, if you

lose, Kuro-dono will be given the right to order you."

No, I don't need such things like an order right.

Semeri's expression becomes warped when our eyes meet.
Please stop covering the deep valley that you're fully displaying from my view.
It's really vexing.

"S, shameless orders are no no!"
"Ara, Semeri, do you feel like losing?"

While still staying as a head only, the blond beauty teases Semeri as if getting her revenge for before.

The scene is too surreal.
These girls are really Undeads huh.

I produce a glass-like transparent sword with [Magick Sword] magic chantlessly, and wield it.

"Hou, you're making a weapon from『Dancing Blade』type of magic huh. Really quite unusual way nanodearu."

It makes me feel that I'm really odd when those were said by a vampire who's lived for a long time.

However, I had to disrupt such thought since Semeri was coming to attack me, wielding a great sword with her slender arm.
I thought that she was a brute-force type of person, but it seems she unexpectedly practices proper swordsmanship.

She's probably been swinging swords in her free times during the 170 years of her life.
Her swordsmanship is polished enough to liken her with Pochi's master.

However, her craftiness isn't comparable to the elf master--thus, she's easy to read.

In addition to that, Semeri's expression is too rich.
Just like when I'm training with Pochi, I allow her to do the attack she wants while gradually cornering her.

Semeri who's been cornered cut her wrist and attack with the blood that have turned into needles.
I disperse such a desperate attack with [Short Stun] and destroy Semeri's great sword with the magick sword.

"Kuh, damn."

I block the blood sword that Semeri's created with the magick sword in one hand, slip to the

bosom of her body which is pushing in, hitting it with my palm.
The moment my palm touches her body, I drain her magic power in one go with [Mana Drain].

Losing her magic defense, I drive in my palm which is shaped like it's gouging thing.
Looks like even vampires breathe, Semeri stopped moving after losing her breath.

While pulling my palm back, my other hand is swinging the magick sword toward her neck, but it stops right before it hits the neck.
No, I stopped it.

I couldn't cut the neck of a woman who looks like nothing but human save for her pale skin.
Even though I know she won't die, I'd likely still feel repulsed.

"Winner, Kuro-dono!"

However, the True Ancestor seems to have judged my victory.
Semeri coughs violently with both her hands on the ground.

"Kuro-dono, what do you wish of Semeri."

Before answering the True Ancestor, I look at Semeri.
She's gnawing her mouth in vexation, trembling in disgrace.

My sadistic side is incited, but I'm not going to ask perverted things.
None.

"Right then--"

Please forgive me for making Semeri a bit anxious.
She has the natural characteristic of being easy to tease.

"--Could she guide me around the attractions of the labyrinth's lower layer?"

My request seems to be surprising, Semeri tilts her head in puzzlement while saying, "Attractions?"
True Ancestor seems to like it, he claps my shoulders while laughing pleasantly.

"Attractions it is! Leave it to me. I'll let you see astounding attractions that you have never seen before."

Apparently, Semeri interprets it as a new challenge from me, she energetically points her hand at me.

Looks like she's eager to guide me immediately, but it's going to be dawn soon, today I'm going to have a date with Zena-san in the noon, and a party with the guildmaster in the evening.
I have to escort Lady Karina to the tea party and the banquet tomorrow, so I ask for the tour

to be held the day after tomorrow.
I could do it tonight, but I'd love to have a proper rest before touring the attractions.

As for the rewards of the fight from the True Ancestor, he's going to introduce me with the reincarnated people who live in the lower layer.
Let's visit them as I'm touring the attractions later.

Part 12 - Date (1)

Satou's here. Talking about greeneries when I live in the city, I feel that I've only ever seen roadside trees and decorative plants there.
I do take walks in the park sometimes, but it's a shame that doing it at the dawn of the day after an all-nighter will likely get me questioned by the police.

◇

"Now, let's go!"
"Aye~"
"Roger! Nanodesu!!!"

Tama answered Lady Karina's yell in her usual carefree manner, but Pochi raised her voice louder than usual.
I wonder if the slight desperation I've heard is because of the stress from the meat absent.
From now on, let's make it only two days for the meatless punishment.

"I'll prepare full-course meat party tomorrow morning, so do your best okay."
"Guah! I'll do my best nodesu!"

Pochi who has regained brightness on her eyes grips both her hands and psyches herself.

"Full cour~se?"
"That's right. Starting with three kinds of roast beef as the hors d'oeuvre, then shabushabu, karaage, teriyaki chicken, beef stew, and last but not least, thi~ck steaks. Of course there are seven kinds of hamburg steaks including the orthodox Japanese style and Western style. For the entremet, there will be shrimp and crab dishes with sukiyaki."

Pochi's tail is swinging faster whenever I narrate each item.

"Aaa.... I'm looking forward too much, I don't know what to do nanodesu!"
"Wakuwaku~"
<TLN: Excited.>
"It sounds very wonderful. In order to empty my stomach, I will also be participating in the labyrinth exploration today."

It's not only Tama and Pochi who can't express their joy, Liza seems to be excited with the meat festival, her tail is banging on the floor.

They like meat that much huh.

I see the energetic beastkin off, "Do your best."
I felt a slight pity toward Erina and the others who are being dragged by Lady Karina, but since they would also participate in the meat festival, I encouraged them to work hard also.

◇

"Satou-san, it's a good day today isn't it."
"Yes, the cloud unusually come out, it makes the sunlight feels nice."

I've come to the lodging estate where Zena-san's Selected Corps are staying, but Zena-san who's been waiting before the gate of the estate looks awfully tense.

Hmm?
What is she tense about after all this time?

I get off the carriage I've borrowed for the date today and escort Zena-san to it.
She might be embarrassed because Lilio and some others unfamiliar faces from the corps are peeking curiously from the other side of the gate.

The old coachman puts a stool on the ground to support Zena-san who's wearing skirt to get on the carriage.
He's someone dispatched by the cab carriage association, I often employs him when I use cab carriage since he drives the carriage carefully and is unexpectedly attentive despite his taciturn unsociable-like demeanor.

"Zena-san, have you eaten breakfast?"
"Y-yes."

Her reaction is slightly slow when I talk to her.
Maybe her condition isn't good after all?

"If you're still not feeling well, why don't we postpone the outing?"
"No, I'm fine."

She doesn't look that fine, so I'm going to refresh her at a place with good sceneries.
I instructed the old coachman to take us to the park near the Ivy Mansion.

◇

"I didn't know that there's a place with such rich greenery in this city."
"There's a facility made by someone called the Elf Sage nearby that enables water from a water-source to flow on the ground surface. The nature here is rich as the aftereffect."

I narrate back what Leriril has told me to Zena-san who's wide-eyed after seeing the trees and lawn of the park.
In fact, it's not just merely a water source, it also draws up [Mana] from the earth's vein.

Putting that said, since Zena-san's vigor has come back a bit, let's take walk here.
I tell the old coachman to stop the carriage on the grassland near the park entrance.

"Would you like to take a bit of stroll?"
"Yes, I'd be glad to."
"It feels really refreshing to walk around here, I'm sure you'll feel pleasant."

I tell the old coachman to wait here, take Zena-san's hand, and relaxedly walk on the lane under the tree shadows.

"Satou-san...."
"Yes."

I do not urge Zena-san who's faltering after saying my name, I'll just wait for her to collect her words.

It's very cool here, probably due to the vapor from the morning dews.
In addition, the sounds of birds chirping between the trees are really nice on the ears.

"Um, Satou-san, have you, umm, been a noble since you were in Seryuu city?"
"No, I was a normal commoner at that time."

It seems she wanted to hear that, Zena-san's shoulders lose her tense after hearing me saying so.
It's not that important of a thing right?

I briefly talked about how I saved some relatives of a noble from thieves, brought them to Baron Muno which ended up in Liza and the others repelling the monsters that attacked Muno city, as the result, I was granted chevalier title by the Baron.

"....Then, that beautiful person was?"

Someone whom Zena-san expressed with [Beautiful], meaning it's either Lady Karina or Nana?
It's probably Lady Karina since I've introduced her to Zena-san before.
I explain to her, guessing so.

"Is it about the woman with rolled blond hair?"
"Y-yes."
"That person is Karina-sama, she's the daughter of Baron Muno. She's always wanted to go to the labyrinth city since a long time ago, she's currently enjoying herself exploring the labyrinth, guided by Liza and the others."

Zena-san looks puzzled, I guess the daughter of a baron exploring a labyrinth is unexpected.

"She probably wants to become strong since she said she wanted to become the hero's attendant."
"I can understand that!"

You do huh....
Zena-san and Lady Karina might unexpectedly have similar taste.

◇

While taking half a hour stroll, I talked about the event when I met Mia and Nana.

Of course, I can't exactly tell her the thing about the [Maze of Trazayuya] and the [Undead King Zen], so I've revised the content here and there.

I heard a small sound from Zena-san's stomach during that time.
She probably hasn't eaten breakfast after all.

There should be Tama's napping space ahead of these trees.
Let's have a lunch there today.

We can't see it from the lane, but if you just follow the animal trail for a bit, you'll arrive at Tama's napping space.
Small butterflies are flying among the sunlight between the trees, small squirrel-like animals peek their face from the shadow of the branches.
It's a space that's quite pleasing for hearts.

I put a sheet on the meadow for us to sit down, and take out sandwiches and whale karage from the lunchbox I've made this morning.
I've prepared honeyed lemonade as the drink. Though I've said lemonade, I used some handball-sized fruits that tasted like lemon to make the fruit juice.

"Um, does Satou-san has [Item Box] skill?"
"Oh it's just that this bag is a magic item. Just like the [Item Box], it can hold a lot of item."
"Amazing. You're like the magician from picture books."

I pass the magic bag (Holding Bag) to Zena-san who was eagerly admiring it, letting her touch it as she wants.

I hid it in Seryuu city it, but there's no problem showing it now because I've been using it normally with everyone's fairy bag as the camouflage ever since we arrived at the Labyrinth City.
Surprisingly enough, there wasn't anyone who tried to steal this bag as it seemed the Red Iron Plate worked as repellents.

"Now then, why don't have a bite."

I pass Zena-san a handmade paper napkin and teach her the way to eat the sandwich.
We're going to eat the sandwich by wrapping it in paper napkins, but I've brought two forks for the karage.

"Is this a white bread? This is the first time I've seen a bread this thin and soft."
"It's a kind of white bread called loaf bread."

I made this loaf bread for Arisa who requested it strongly.
I got the bread's yeast in the Royal Capital, but it took me half a month before I could made good loaf bread.

Arisa bit the completed loaf bread in her mouth while running in the corridor, saying "I'm late, I'm late", which made her getting scolded by not only Liza and Lulu, but even Ms.

Miteruna.
I understand the parody, but just what was she trying to do.

"You could eat this karage as is, but dipping it in this red sauce or this yellow sauce would make it taste even more delicious."

The red one is a slightly sweet tomato sauce, the yellow one is a slightly bitter mustard sauce.

There are two kinds of sandwiches; egg sandwiches, and cheese & ham sandwiches.
I had prepared tuna flakes too, but since that peculiar flake sensation was popular among the mansion maids who tasted it, I passed it off this time.

"Delicious"

Zena-san mutters a single word and becomes speechless after nibbling a light bite of the sandwich.
It's been awhile since I see such reaction.

"It's really delicious. I thought this red one was pepper, but it's sweet isn't it."
"Yes, that's a flavoring made from the royal capital's specialty fruit called tomato."

It seems the sandwich and the karage were to Zena-san's liking, they were gone into her stomach in a blink of an eye.
While Zena-san is having a late breakfast, I tell her about my workshop visits and Sir Tisrad's wedding in the duke castle at the duchy capital humorously.

When Zena-san hears about the fireworks that adorned the wedding at the end, she leaks a sigh like she's envious from the innermost depth of her heart, "It sounds wonderful", while looking entranced.
Since that behavior was so cute, I unconsciously promised Zena-san to show her fireworks next time.
I feel bad if I have to ask Arisa, so let's make some magic tools that can shoot fireworks once again.

With Zena-san who has fully recovered, we leave the park behind.

Part 13 - Date (2)

Satou's here. I completely don't remember the field study of my schooldays era, but I remember well the field study at the beer factory, and the semi-conductor factory during the time when I was a working adult.
The depth of fascination really is different for things that interest you.

◇

After we're done eating, per Zena-san's wish, we're going to look around shops specialized for explorers.
I ask the carriage to wait on the entrance to the arm street, and then we march there on feet.

Many craftsmen are making Maces and Bone Hammers made from monster materials on the joint establishment located beside the weapon shop.
Although it's probably for the sake of efficiency, please stop piling up the unprocessed materials on places that can be seen from the street.

"Aren't these corpses of monsters?"
"That's right. However, I think it'd be better to call it materials rather than corpses."

Since I sensed that the air among the craftsmen became unsettling with Zena-san's nonchalant word, I'm correcting her in low voice.

Zena-san who realized that she had a verbal slip apologizes toward the craftsmen while lowering head.
It's very like Zena-san to act like a good young lady like this, but it seems the craftsmen didn't expect her to lower her head to them, after getting taken aback, they accepts the apology, saying [Don't mind it.] brusquely.

There are a lot of arms made from monster materials that are processed without change around this area.
Shops that produce pseudo-magic swords with alchemy are doing their works indoor or in their courtyard to prevent people stealing the technique.
I've guided Zena-san to a shop that deals with such pseudo-magic swords.

"The shops here look grand."
"That's because they're the foremost weapon and magic tools shops-joint in the labyrinth city."

The weapons that are sold here is 10 gold coin much at the lowest, so average explorers don't quite go to the luxury shops here.
However, quality-wise, they're undoubtedly the finest in the labyrinth city, so I'm thinking of making Zena-san known to the shopkeepers.
Although it's probably going to be awhile before she can buy here, but since the Seryuu Selected Corps are excellent, it should be not long before they're coming here to have

transactions.

When I enter the shop while escorting Zena-san, several sociable female shopkeepers energetically greet us, "Welcome", together at once.
I urge Zena-san who greets them back after being lured by their vigor, and go on to check on the displayed weapons and armors.

There are around 10 display stands in the excessively spacious shop interior, each of the stands have two shopkeepers without exception.
Those women are former explorers, and it seems they're not only here to be shop assistants, but also as guards for the commodity.
I've seen many times the case where a guest tried to touch the neat and trim female shopkeeper's butt only for her to twist their wrist while smiling brightly.

Putting that aside, I walk on, guiding Zena-san toward one of the display stand.

"This is a dagger made from the crystal horn of the Dread Beast, Crystal Dagger."
"It's beautiful."

Zena-san who saw the crystal dagger shown by the shopkeeper breathed out a sight of admiration.
This is a weapon made from horn of the triceratops-like monster I saw when I was exterminating the lost thieves.
It can produce electricity that paralyze enemies like a stun-gun if you fill it with magic power.
Zena-san is probably charmed by its jewel-like appearance though.

"If that interests honored guest, please try holding them if you would."

Encouraged by the female shopkeeper, Zena-san timidly takes the dagger.
Zena-san holds the dagger while looking a bit excited, but then she looks like she notices something and puts the dagger back to the stand while looking pale.

Hm?

"Was there something wrong?"
"T-the price tag."

Zena-san whispers to my ear in low voice.
While feeling slightly ticklish, I look at the dagger on the stand, it has the price tag of [120 gold coins].
It wasn't like this before though.
Furthermore, that's three times the market price.

When I ask the female shopkeeper, turns out it's not a sudden price hike, but it's priced to be sold to merchants who come from outside the city.
The price is clearly exorbitant, but sometimes there are merchants who still buy it at this price.

"If it isn't Chevalier Pendragon-sama. Welcome to our humble store."

The middle-aged shop manager comes out of the back and greets me while nodding to his other regular customers.
He's been a sociable person ever since he was introduced to me by Baronet Dyukeli, but the reason why he gave such a grand welcome is because I've lend a hand on reproducing the recipe to make this crystal dagger.
Of course, I didn't directly give the recipe, but pretended to give the hint by coincidence.

Leaving that aside, as I've wanted, I make Zena-san's face known, bring her to tour the workshops, and have the craftsmen teach her the way to strip materials from monster in order to sell them high.
While waiting for Zena-san who's writing a memo about the way to strip materials with serious face, I go to see the manager-shi who's standing beside another craftsman making a pseudo-magic sword's blade made from [<<Soldier Mantis>>]'s material.

"It comes out well. Chevalier-sama, would you like to try it?"
"Yes, if you allow me to."

I take the sword manager-shi's presented to me.
The grip hasn't been made yet, but there's no problem in holding it since I'm not going to slash thing with it.

I put magic power into the blade.
Looks like it's not made well, I feel some resistance when I'm putting magic power into the great sword. I feel that it's stuck halfway through.

I concentrate at the place where the magic power is stuck, and then wring my magic power like a needle, operating it to expand on the path.
Normally it'd take a long time for the user to familiarize themselves, but I guess it's fine since it's not something that other people can notice.

I'm being careful since the blade will break and magic edge will be generated if I put too much magic power into it.
After 10 seconds, faint red light appears on the surface of the blade.

"As expected of Chevalier-sama. To infuse magic power into a magic sword that you've held for the first time!"

Manager-shi flatters me, but anyone should be able to do this much right?
All of our vanguards can commonly do it, even Lulu and Mia can do it after taking some time.

Zena-san raises her face when she hears manager-shi's praising voice, and leaks a surprised sound when she she see the magic-coated blade.

"Satou-san. Is that possibly magic edge?!"
"No, this isn't."

Although it seems she's misunderstood, so I correct it.

"It's not magic edge, but you can make red light appear on the blade of a magic sword made from monster materials if you pour it with magic power."
"It looks beautiful."
"Yes, however it's not just the look, when it's like this, it can give damage to substance-less monsters, and it won't be damaged by attacks of monster that use acid and decomposition breath. It's quite useful if you're engaging in series of battle inside the labyrinth."

I explained it with an all-knowing look toward Zena-san, but I heard this trivia from the roach-raid leader from before, Koshin-shi.
Without Item Box skill and a magic bags, bringing multiple weapons to the labyrinth is too inefficient, so people value this ability more than simple offensive power.

I put out the magic power from the blade and give it back to the manager.
For some reason, he praised me, "As expected of a Mithril Plate explorer", but I've heard this trivia from Koshin-shi, a Bronze Plate holder.

Since the craftsman looks like he wants to discuss the blade with manager-shi, I read the mood and leave the shop behind.

◇

We leave the arm shop street, and go to the street where alchemy and magic items are lined up.
There are a lot of small shops that sell consumable goods here, so there are a lot of explorers here compared to the arm shop street earlier.

I make Zena-san's face known to the shopkeepers while teaching her the market price of goods such as magic potions and ointments, and bargain items on each shop.
I know a lot of shopkeepers here introduced by Baronet Dyukeli during the banquet, so my aim is to get them understand that she is my acquaintance, reducing the risk of them selling her some weird item.

"It's cute. I wonder what is this accessory?"
"Well now? I wonder what is it."

Zena-san is holding a ball-sized magic item in a certain fancy goods shop.
Just as the color indicated, it's a lewd tool, so I suitably dodge the question.

The female shopkeeper approached Zena-san who was going to return the tool to the shelf, and then she whispered to her ear the kind of tool that was.
Zena-san who's become red, quickly returns the tool to the shelf like she held hot-iron.
Then she seizes my arm and runs away from the shop as fast as she can.

Still, I didn't know that there were such magic tools.
Looks like people still do what they do even when the world changes.

We're striding the street until Zena-san calms down, she finally does after we stop and drink some tea near the west guild.
This shop has sweet baked cake and blue tea.
I've been recommended this shop by the female staffs of the west guild.

Today it seems they don't hang the cloth for warding sunlight on the open terrace since the sunlight is weak today.
There are no sands in the wind since it's blowing toward the desert, so we're having some tea on the open terrace.

"The fruit water from before was good, but this blue tea is also nice."
"That's because, according to the guilds staff, this seems to be the shop which serves the best blue tea in the labyrinth city."

Some voices interrupted us when we were having such conversations.

◇

"It really was master's smell nodesu!"
"There's Zena too~"

Pochi and Tama who lean their body on the fence of the cafe's open terrace appeal themselves while swinging their tail.
Liza comes from behind them and then lift them both.

"Master, Zena-sama, please forgive us for disturbing you."
"It's alright."

I give the baked sweets left on the small plate to the two who are being carried under Liza's arms.

"Pochi, Tama, a~n."
"A~n?"
"Nanodesu!"

I decide to act like I didn't see Zena-san opening her mouth a bit when I was turning to her.
Feeding the two little girls is one thing, but doing it to Zena-san who looks like a senior high school student in public is too high of a hurdle.

"Are you done with the labyrinth exploring for today?"
"No, we have finished the work at Area 13, so we retreated to have a break."

Looks like they're working hard.
While leveling-up Lady Karina and the others, Liza is also trailblazing the depopulated Area 13.
It'll be complete after they create safety zones and cull out dangerous monsters that can endanger their hunt.
At the moment, [Pendora] guys are opening it, they're probably going to use it for the

Training School's guys after the monster number has decreased a bit more.
By opening, it's not because there's a door that prohibit intrusion, they're only going to tell the safe route to Area 13 and distribute map of the safety zones there.

I don't see anyone beside the three beastkin girls, so I confirm it to Liza while rustling Pochi's and Tama's hair.

"Karina-sama and the others are resting in the explorer guild sickbay since their level-up nausea were bad. They should be fine since Nana is with them."
"It's the person who was being carried yesterday right? To have the nausea continues until the next day, maybe it's better if the priest check..."
"Zena-sama, that is not correct. Karina-sama and the others have leveled up again during the exploration today."

I saw Zena-san's surprised face while playing [Look that way] game with Pochi and Tama.
My eyes are chasing the two's fingers since our [Look that way] game adopt the house rule which states that you'd lose if you can't follow the finger.

"W, what kind of drill did you do?"
"We only performed some dozens of battles. We only defeated a bit less than 100 monsters, so it is not enough to be called a drill."
"H-hundred?"
"If Zena-sama is interested, how about training with us once? Is it alright Master?"

Liza suggested so to Zena-san who was at loss.
Thinking about Zena-san's group goal, power-leveling her probably will help guaranteeing her safety.
After confirming whether Zena-san would be a hindrance to them, I approve it since Lady Karina's and her maids' levels are lower than Zena-san's.

Zena-san hesitated for a bit, but it looks like she's decided to go together with Liza and the others to the labyrinth.
I lent the carriage to Zena-san to come back to the lodging estate and take her equipments.

I was going to lend her Lulu's hard newt leather armor since her armor should be destroyed before, but she declined and said that she was going to borrow the leather armor of her magician co-worker.
They're with Nana today, she should be fine even with common armor.

Until she comes back, I continue accompanying Pochi and Tama's [Look that way] game which have accelerated to the speed where an average person won't be able to keep up.

Part 14 - Power-leveling

Zena Point of View

"Thank you for taking care of me today."

I greet the daughter of Baron Muno in front of the explorer guild.
She splashed her luxurious golden-colored hair to the back, slanting her body while looking displeased.
Even if I'm referred by Satou-san, it must be unpleasant when an outsider suddenly takes part after all.

"Karina-sama?"
"It's nothing. Just don't become a drag."
"Karina~?"
"Tsuntsun is no good nanodesu."
"Zena-sama is a master of wind magic. She will not be a hindrance."

Karina-sama criticized me with some harsh words, but she begrudgingly accepted my participation with Liza and the others' mediation.
My chest feels slightly fuzzy when I see Karina-sama who's reddened as Satou-san whispers something on her ear.

◇

"Mot~"
"It's a Maze Moth nanodesu!"

The two featherkin infants shoot their light crossbow toward the direction Pochi and Tama, who are acting as the vanguard, point at.
The Maze Moth got hit with the two arrows and fell to the ground.
Their aim is as good as Lilio even though they're so small.
They must have undergone strict training ever since they're aware of oneself, no doubt.

We have only fought weak ones like maze moths and goblins during the journey so far since other explorers worked hard (to cull monsters).
Gina-sama of [Moonlight] has said to me that there are only a few monsters in the main corridors that connect between areas.

"Be careful, we're going to arrive at our objective Area 19 soon."

Everyone including me nods at Satou-san's warning.
We go through the crevice of a row of rocks that block the main corridor.

Tama who's going first says, "Trap", and then she goes to a corner of the corridor with careful steps.

"Procedure~ Canceled~"
"As expected of Tama nanodesu!"

--Fast.
To cancel it just by rustling a bit in the shadow like that.

"Monsters are coming from the front nodesu."
"It's a needle caterpillar (Needle Crawler). They can shoot needles that can paralyze you, so don't let it hit you okay."
"It's awright~"
"It's alright if they don't hit you nanodesu!"

Despite the Needle Crawler's dull-looking appearance, it's coming to us faster than a running man.

"Zena-san, please put up defensive magic."
"Yes!"

Oh no. I should've chanted it before Satou-san urged me.
I began to chant [<<Wind Protection>>] wind magic in panic.
However, the Needle Crawler that's approaching faster than the magic taking shape, stops, then it spreads its body and readies itself to shoot.

--I won't make it.

But, I can't stop the chant.
I'll stop a few of them at least!

"Caterpillar! Shooting needles, acting like you're an archer, how ridiculous so I mock!"

Nana-san who held a great shield came to the front and provoked it.
Countless needles shot by the Needle Crawler rush toward her. I feel chill down my spine as the rapier-sized needles fly one by one.

The dying figure of Nana-san who has been pierced with countless needless along with her great shield.

--such hallucination did not happen fortunately.

Her great shield which is made from material I've never seen before bounces the hitting needles while leaving heavy sounds.
Pochi and Tama skillfully intercept some needles which have missed her great shield.

The [<<Wind Protection>>] magic that has finally been invoked block the second volley of the needles.

"This monster is a bit dangerous huh. Sorry but let's not use this monster for the [Power-leveling]. Take care of it with Nana's magic before it approaches if you find one."

"Yes, master."

One term that I don't understand is mixed among Satou-san's talk.
However, I think this isn't the time to have a chat.

"Pochi, Tama, let's destroy it. Follow me."
"Don't worry be happy sir~?"
"Roger nanodesu!"

Liza and the others rush toward the space where the third round of needles are flying.
They're too reckless no matter how you see it.

"Wait!"

Karina-sama told them to halt, but Liza and the others aren't stopping.

But, I've misunderstood.
Karina-sama joins the battlefield where the needles are flying around.
With her golden-colored hair fluttering from her helmet, her beautiful limbs dance in the air as if she's the incarnation of beauty itself.

Satou-san stopped me who was lured and had made a step forward.

"It's dangerous. Those four should be able to handle it."

Just as he's said, Liza and the two others handily beat the monster.
Not only Liza's spear, Pochi's and Tama's weapons also shined red light, so they must be magic swords.
Karina-sama swings the Heavy Hammer she's shouldering, knocking the entire body of the monster to the ground.

A whip-like tentacle sprouting from the Needle Crawler's head is going toward Karina-sama.
However, a small shield that appears before her blocks the tentacle even though it's cracked because of it.

Is that magic?
Or a magic tool?

Satou-san who has noticed my line of sight calls out to me.

"Karina-sama is fine since he has the protection of the Magic Creature Raka."

It seems the decorations on her neck and limbs are Intelligent Item.
To have a family heirloom that only appears in fairy-tale like that, as expected of a territory-holder lord.
--She's rich on top of being that beautiful, it's really enviable.

◇

"....■■ Air Blast"

My magic intercepts the Armor Moth who was rushing here.
Slightly later, the featherkin infants shoot their light crossbows.

Liza's spear and Nana-san's great sword cut its armor, Pochi and Tama's stone-throwing create holes on its wing.
Karina-sama and her two female soldiers take turn to hit it once, and lastly the three beastkin girls finish the battle.

Even though my magic and the girls' attack were repelled by its armor, Liza, Nana-san and the others easily cut through it.
I think this is the difference between us and Mithril Explorers.

One needs that much strength in order to stand by Satou-san's side....
I feel uneasy about my remaining magic power after doing so many battles, but it should have run out faster if not for the wand I've received from Kuro-san.

Although I feel dizzy after overusing my magic, I won't be able to catch up to Satou-san and the others if I rest.
I will fight with the Magic Short Sword I've received together with this long wand if I run out of magic power.

"Are you tired?"
"I-I'm fine!"

I muster up a bravado as to not worry Satou-san.

"You would collapse if you overexert yourself you know. Go ahead and refresh yourself with this."

I receive the small bottle that he's presented to me worryingly, and drink down the citrus flavored liquid.
I feel that magic power wells up from within my body, subsiding the dizziness.

--Don't tell me it was a magic power recovery potion?

My question was quickly affirmed, but the magic potions that I know are hard to drink with strong grass flavor.
Moreover, even though it should be several silver coins worth even for one, he said, "I have a lot", and gave me more bottles.

"Recovering magic power with meditation will use up the time, so please drink it freely."

Although he said that, I don't think I can drink these expensive magic potions so readily.
Even in territorial army, it's a valuable item that's supplied to me only one bottle for emergency...

--I feel like it'll make my sense of value go haywire.

◇

I wonder how many monsters we've defeated.
I understand why the eyes of the two Karina-sama's guards looked like a dead fish's when they were entering the labyrinth.
They've been repeating this absurd ways of fight day after day.

The two guards expressed their poor physical condition right after the featherkin infants, so we're taking a break in a small room called Safety Zone, guided by Satou-san.

Come to think of it, Satou-san has been guiding our journey so far, but I've never seen him use luminance stones to check the course, nor did he check map even once.
I wonder if he has memorized all of the routes?
Satou-san has never pulled the mithril sword on his waist so far.
He must be in charge of direction and mapping.

"Zena, a~n."
"Thank you."

I receive the honey cake that Pochi presents and put it into my mouth.
It's sweet enough to be too sweet, but right now, this sweet spreads out deliciously.

....Looks like I had gone to sleep before I knew it.
I was laid on a carpet with tender felt that had been put on the ground.

When I look up, I see Pochi and Tama silently playing signal-like game with their hands.

"Have you woken up?"

I receive the tureen and a spoon that Satou-san, who says "You're hungry right?", presents me.
The tureen is warm with appetizing steam rising.

--Steam?

I see a hot pot that's being heated on fire behind Satou-san.
It looks like he's cooking inside the labyrinth. The people of [Moonlight] have taught me that it's an act that must not be conducted since it'll gather monsters.

"It's alright since this is a safety zone."

As if reading my worry, Satou-san informs me with his usual calm tone like he's whispering.
When I'm with him, I feel like I'm hallucinating we are in the middle of the city.

The thick vegetable stew that I have is more delicious than any other dish I've ever had.
That's why, I involuntarily asked for a second helping.

--To be that much delicious is unfair.

◇

My body feels light thanks to the light sleep.
I have a feeling that my magic power has increased somewhat.

We continue the same kind of series of battles after the break, but we are now able to reliably defeat the enemies since everyone has grasped their role.

That appeared from the Gushing Hole as if to prick such carelessness.

--Scissor Centipede

Its very long body looks like a tower when it stands up, sharp claws on the tip of its countless legs are shaped like swords.
And, its crab-like pincers on the sides of its head are emitting fiendish red light.

That pincer swings down toward me who's frozen over the centipede's gigantic body.

We are currently fighting nearly 10 powerful monsters.
There's no one that can prevent that fiendish blade--

Even though I know it's futile, I holds my long wand up to block the swinging-down pincer.
Another enemy would skewer me if I were to avoid to the side.

--Just before the pincer bisects the wand in two, a black tornado cuts in.

After kicking away the swinging right-pincer, Satou-san who had appeared out of nowhere brought me to a safe location.

"It's alright now."

Satou-san smiles refreshingly as if to make me feel relieved.
He still looks relaxed even though he's just saved me from danger. Nimbly so, like he always is.

"Insolent fool who tried to put their hands on Zena-sama."

The left pincer which pursued us is warded by a red spear, making it pierce the ground instead.
Liza holds the red spear in one hand, and uses her other hand to push the left pincer into the ground.
That hand seemingly glow red.

"A mere centipede trying to fight Master and Zena-sama, you're a hundred years too early."

The moment after Liza's words, the left pincer is destroyed with a boom sound.
Was that magic just now?

"Liza, I leave the rest to you."
"Understood."

Liza's spear which is clad in red light emits even stronger red light--is that Magic Edge?
I wonder if her secret skill is [Magic Edge]?

She pulls back the spear to the limit, and then thrusts it toward the centipede in one go.
It's not a distance that a spear can reach no matter how long it is.

--Eh?

A lump of red light flies from the tip of the spear like a cannonball, hitting the centipede's head.
When the light disappear, the figure of the centipede with a large hole on its head remains.

Is that perhaps, the shooting [Magic Edge] technique that appears in the hero story I've read in my childhood.
I thought that was just a creation, I've never thought it actually exists.

However, there was no leeway for me to be perturbed from that miscellaneous matter.
The centipede that had lost its head split on its joints, and came attacking like different creatures.

"Magic Edge Cannon nanodesu!"
"Majin Cannon~, How many~?"
"More! Nanodesu!"
"Falcon Phalanx~"

Blasting with carefree voices, Pochi and Tama wreck the BlockPedes with countless red light bullets they shoot from their locations.

--Am I watching a dream I wonder.

I forget to support them with wind magic, as I can only watch the spectacle, dumbfounded.

◇

I was shocked when I checked my growth in the explorer guild.
My level has increased from 17 to 24 in just one day.

It's said that growths are fast in the labyrinth, but this is just too fast no matter how you look at it.
It shouldn't be strange for Liza and the two others who were powerless to turn into superior explorers in just several months.

Probably, Satou-san's guidances and commands are amazing.
Except in that one Gushing Hole case, I never felt that my life was in danger even after we did such continuous battles.

When I was in the labyrinth with everyone from the Selected Corps, I felt that every battle had my life on the line even though we only fought minor enemies.

We need knowledge and experience to cover this difference.
I will ask if I can enter the Training School that Satou-san manages next time.

◇

During the labyrinth exploration, I tried to converse with Karina-sama many times, but she only ever replied with, "Yes", or "You're right" short.

Once, we had a conversation that continued on for a bit with Satou-san as the topic, but her guards poked fun at her, getting it interrupted.
Even though she looks like a gaudy beauty, she seems to be surprisingly pure.

I think that I want to become friend with her for sure.

During that labyrinth exploration, I remember sympathizing with her who earnestly wished nothing but getting stronger, without complaining even once.
She might be my rival in love, but someday I want to have an all-night talk about Satou-san, accompanied with drink, with her.

And then, someday, together the two of us will arrive at the height where Satou-san and the others are!

Part 15 - Revisit

Satou's here. I wonder when did I begin bringing presents whenever I visit my friend's place?
It was normal to not bring anything when we were children, but when my friend became a family man, it became normal to bring something in order to relieve the guilty feeling of intruding a newly-wed household.

◇

Last night was tiring.
I went to the drinking party sponsored by the guildmaster after returning to the labyrinth city, it was quite a sabbath.

I had completely forgotten to make the appetizer due to the date that became a power-leveling endeavor, but thanks to the thoughtful Lulu who had cooked various things, I was able to somehow got out of the trouble.
The liquor that the guildmaster boasted was quite good. The scathing impact that came with a mouthful was quite a thing, yet the aftertaste was refreshing, so it made you keep wanting another cup.
I wasn't the only one who seemed to think so, the guildmaster emptied the bottle before I could ask for the second cup.

I had expected it to become like that, so I took out a barrel of wine that I had bought when I was buying the cheap wine for True Ancestor Ban.

Was it due to the Mithril Plate, I felt that there were plainly more female staffs and female explorers who approached me.
In a sense, the only people who didn't change their attitude were the brothel Onee-sans.
I guess either one of them was aiming for fame and money.

Eluding the younger female staffs were easy, but resisting the temptation of the sexy young women were painful.
Fighting demon lords or doing continuous battle is easier than this.

◇

"Hauu, it's too blissful it's scary nodesu."
"Full stomach~ full stomach~?"
"Supreme bliss."

As promised, I had made the meat feast for Pochi and the others who woke right up as the sun rose.
The three are lying down on the cushions in the living room with swelled stomach that looks like it comes out of a manga.
Their expression on their face is loose, looking blissful.

Mia and me exited in the first round, but the three beastkin girls fought the meat dishes to

the bitter end.

"It sure was delicious, but that amount wasn't something that could be eaten in one sitting was it."
"Nn."

Arisa said it like it's not her business, but she, who participated until the third round, had just been moaning, "I'm dying from eating too much", until I gave her stomach medicine.
Erina and the other who participated to third round with Arisa have gone to bed after taking the stomach medicine.

Lulu and me who are exhausted from the cooking also become the dwellers of the bed.
Therefore, I've asked Ms. Miteruna in charge of dressing Lady Karina who's going to participate in the tea party today.

◇

I let Lady Karina, whose face looks stiff from being nervous, to sit on the sofa as recommended by the Marchioness. I sit beside her in order to cover her.

"Oh my, such wonderful clothing."
"Is it the fashion of the royal capital?"
"Isn't this cloth the green silk of Oyugock dukedom."

Not only the Marchioness, the noble wives who surround her also talk to Lady Karina, but they praise only her accessories, not Lady Karina herself.
I wonder if it's the tacit rule to not refer her by appearance during such time.

While fully displaying her shyness of strangers, Lady Karina replies the wives curtly with, "Yes", or "No", she's catching up with the conversation but not continuing it.
I tried to follow-up as much as I could, but the conversation became to be only with me.

There's no choice but for her to start by making friends of the same age.

"Is Karina-sama going to get married to Chevalier Satou?"

Baroness Larupott who likes stories about adultery and syrupy love stories brought that topic while smiling obscenely.
Since Lady Karina was in trouble without being able to either confirm or deny it, I eluded the talk by saying, "Lady Karina is more suited to someone who is of higher class than someone like me."

The Baroness tried to recommend her 30-year-old fifth son to Lady Karina, but I changed the topic to be about the rumor of relationship between that fifth son and a certain baron's daughter before Lady Karina made a verbal slip.

Although, I feel that Lady Karina wouldn't have responded anyway since she was sending displeased glance at me, but Baroness Larupott still got into the different topic I presented

while looking satisfied.

The mood of the place has become slightly strange, so I have the maids to bring in the Shortcakes and Cheese Tarts I've handed them in advance to soften the mood.

The Marchioness's lady attendant whispers something to the Marchioness's ear, and then she looks at me while hiding half of her childish smile behind a folding fan.

--It's probably better for me to prepare myself to look surprised.

I've already known the prepared surprise guest with the marker reflected on my radar, but I won't be able to recompense her hardship if I react plainly.

"It seems the the preparation for the second guest has been completed. Enter."

Zena-san in dress enters the room while being escorted by the Marchioness's lady attendant.
I look surprised while taking care not to be exaggerated about it.

"My my, for Satou-dono who's usually calm to become that flustered."

It seems she was satisfied with my behavior, the Marchioness offhandedly muttered, "This one is really the favorite after all".

◇

After finishing the worrisome tea party and dinner, I escorted Zena-san back to her lodging, and Lady Karina to the detached building of the mansion.

I was somehow able to finish without displeasing the Marchioness community, but since my reaction should have been weak toward their effort to make fun of me, they probably won't invite these two girls again in the future.

The only fruit of all this is the fact that the two held conversations about hero story.
Lady Karina who was shy of strangers became talkative when it was about hero story although it was kind of unusual to be a topic between ladies.

They shouldn't be enough to be called 'friends' to each other, but at the very least they should be 'acquaintances' now.
If possible I wish Zena-san will become Lady Karina's girl friend.

Unexpectedly enough, I feel that she can get along well with Princess Mitia if the the topic about hero is brought up.

◇

The next morning, I visited the lower layer while bringing the presents for the true ancestor and the vampire princesses.
I've already installed a carved seal board on the large area beside theirs, so I can

immediately go visit them with [(Return)].

"Ban-sama, please use this mithril to make katana as you like."
"Umu, it's a splendid ingot dearuna. I could make a good katana with this dearou."

I stopped my hand which was in the middle of distributing the presents when I heard the vampire princess, whom I gave the mithril ingot to, coaxing the true ancestor.

"Ban-dono, you can make katana?"
"Umu, it took me 300 years before I was finally able to temper a proper katana dearu."
"For future reference, is it alright if you let me see you create a katana?"
"OK dearu. I will need to prepare the smithy, so stop by after Semeri has finished guiding you on the tour."

I've tried to temper some Japanese katana before this, but I still can't make it well even now.
It did ended up looking like a Japanese katana from outside, but it broke easily, and its attack power couldn't be compared to the [Kotetsu] and [Muramasa] I had in my storage.

I finish distributing the presents while feeling slightly overjoyed.

I'm also giving sewing kits and books to the castle maids who seem happy about it.

"Um, is it fine?"
"Of course."
"I want this book."
"I'm taking this corral earrings!"
"You girls! You are before the guest and Ban-sama! Choose it later!"
"""Yes, Mrs. Fedraluca."""

The middle-aged head maid scolds the younger maids who were arguing over the presents.
She looks the oldest in this true ancestor castle, appearance-wise.
It seems she was invited to become a vampire princess countless times, but she firmly declined to stop being a human.

Mrs. Fedraluca carried some items to me and then I put them into my storage via Item Box.
These are the gift I've got from the true ancestor as thanks for my presents.

Some magic weapons that are clearly not common are mixed among them.

"I don't think I've brought items worthy enough to get such a magic sword?"
"They were items I acquired when I hunted the floormaster, you should accept them without worry dearu."
"By any chance, do you have the chant orb?"

I tried asking when I saw a ray of hope.

"Chant is it? We can try searching the treasure vault--"

"The orbs were all used by the maids, so there is nothing left of them."

It didn't remain in the true ancestor's memory, but Mrs. Fedraluca who managed the treasure vault's catalog denied it.

"Is that so dearuka. Do not worry Kuro-dono. You will be able to do it if you just train for 10 years."
"That's right, even the maids here learned it in five years except for the ones who gave up halfway through."

The true ancestor and the severed head that was on top of the tray consoled me.

"Does it take time to get revived from a neck?"
"There wasn't enough blood see. These girls would collapse if I took it from them."

It seems she needs to wait until the magic potion made from a medicinal plant called Blood Spray Herb is finished being made to replenish the deficit blood.
Looks like you can turn water into blood with the magic potion.
I can't imagine its mechanism, but if I consider the uncanny healing power of magic potions, changing water into blood sounds simple in comparison.

I can offer her my blood, but you usually ends up getting treated like ingredient in tales and such, so I won't say something more than necessary.

"Ban-sama! I've come to pick up Kuro!"
"Umu, very well dearu."

Vampire princess Semeri who's in high spirit like always has come.
She's bringing two raptor-type vampires that are fast on their feet.

"First, let's have some fun at Corpse and Armor's place!"

Corpse is probably the [King Mummy] Tetsuo, and Armor is the [Iron Stalker] Takeru.
By having fun, I wonder if they are exhibiting mummies and armors?

"Umu, you will surely have fun dearu."
"Are they doing some kind of tourist attraction?"

Semeri folds her arms and answers with a proud face.

"Yeah, it's war!"

Part 16 - War of the Underground Empire

Satou's here. One would imagine subterranean people if we're talking about underground empire, but thanks to a certain western movie that depicted Egypt, recently I couldn't shake the odd sense of linking it to undeads.

◇

--We came to a battlefield right after we left a cave.

"Looks like they've just started."

Steel frames advance on two carved trenches as their caterpillar tracks make distinctive sound.
Four big tanks that are lining up together stop moving, and then begin to rotate their gun turrets.
A moment later, black smoke begin to spout out of the muzzle brake at the tip of the turret.
--It's not smokeless gunpowder huh.

The four cannonballs shot from the muzzle flutter on the battlefield, piercing steel golem that has just climbed over the trenches.
The cannonballs penetrated through the golem's thick armor, blowing dust of cloud behind it and gouging the ground.
The body of the golem that has been destroyed by the blow is scattered to the surrounding.

"Oh, Corpse's victory shout is coming."
"Victory shout?"

As if covering my question, a loud voice that sounds like it's amplified by a megaphone echoes in the underground space.

『DROP DEAP! FANTASYYYYYY!』

--Oy, oy.

『That again! Show me your own words for your victory shout sometimes!』

His unseen opponent jeered him with synthetic-like voice.
That was probably the [Iron Stalker].

When I look closer, there's a red-and-white-colored thin steel tower standing on the battlefield with a speaker-like part installed on top of it.
The sound just before probably came from that.

Looking at the map, it seems the defending side is the [King Mummy].
The defending side have deployed the four big tanks from before, four armored vehicles, and 56 skeleton soldiers.

The attacking side seems to have seven steel golems and 56 mud soldiers.
Soldiers from both sides don't use swords and shields as their equipments, but rifles equipped with bayonets.

If we include the golem that has just been destroyed, it seems it's a firm 64 vs 64 battle.
This is more like a war game, rather than a war.

◇

Semeri guided me to the spectator tower to see the battle, and just as my first impression suggested, it was more a war game rather than a real war, or maybe it was better to call it a weapon-testing experiment.

The tank side which were devoted to ambush tactic remained superior until their victory.

Once, the golem got closer and successfully destroyed two tanks, but some ambush troops destroyed the golem's legs with disposable bazookas, and then, losing its mobility, the golem was destroyed by concentrated fire from afar.

The modern weapons win if we only look at this battle, but the golems movement were clearly slow.

They looked like the golems that guarded the gate to the true ancestor's Area, but they move [sluggishly] as if their output was lacking.
They should have been able to win against all the tanks if there were golems like the gatekeeper golems.
There might be some limitation, or rather, regulation about it.

"Alright, let's go to Corpse's place."

Following Semeri who has jumped down the tower energetically, I also go down.
Maybe it's because I've just seen some modern weapons in action, after all this time, I feel odd to jump down 50 meters high without a lifeline.

◇

There is a building with white wall that looks like a research facility on the other side of the battlefield.
Barbed wire are furnished on top of the two-meter high fence which would have prompted Arisa to say, "I'm losing the fantasy-feeling", if she were here.
It seemed Semeri had free pass, we greeted the mummies who were guarding the gate without being stopped and entered the building.
I thought the building was made from marble when I saw it from afar, but I see that it's made from concrete when I look close.

We go forward in the building while being guided by the skeleton who welcomed us.
I decided to act as if I never saw the skeleton who was wearing maid uniform.

We're led to an around-50-tatami wide room that's illuminated by fluorescent lamp-like light.
There's a big table in the center, and miniature tanks and golems have been placed on the diorama that's modeled after the battlefield earlier.

There are a mummy and a full-body armor doing some kind of verbal warfare between that table.
I understand that those two are the [King Mummy] Tetsuo, and the [Iron Stalker] Takeru from AR indicator.

"Muu, Semeri huh. Did you come here to ask for a tank to fight Ban?"
"I'll especially design a reinforced one if ya let me massage those lump of fat that aren't put to use for one hour, how bout it?"
"Y-you perverted gramps! How're you going to take responsibility if I get hated by Ban-sama for bringing such a boorish thing like a tank!"

Corpse and Armor are about to escape from Semeri who's raised her arms with a face reddened from their sexual-harassment remarks.
It's not my imagination, they look to be some fun people. However, their mind seem to be like a primary schooler.

After thoroughly playing around with Semeri, the two who finally noticed me asked my identity.

"By the way, who's the guy over there?"
"Is he Semeri's, this?"

Armor makes an indecent sign with his finger, and then his helmet falls down to the floor after getting hit by Semeri.
The inside really is hollow huh.

"Nice too meet you, my name is Kuro. Coming from the same place as Ban-dono--A『Japanese』, did that come through?"
"Nuu? A black haired『Japanese』despite not being a hero?"
"Did you come looking for immortal body at that age? Go enjoy your life for another 30 years first."
"That's right, don't be like this machine body of mine. With this metal armor body, even rubbing Semeri's breasts won't feel fun ya know?"
"My breasts belong to Ban-sama!"

They're even noisy while greeting people.

However, just like Ban, I don't feel any malice from them even though they look like they can become the last boss.
Particularly Corpse, I would have thought he was a monster and exterminated him if I didn't meet No Life King Zen before.
--But well, they would have long been defeated or became demon lords and killed by the

hero if they were quick tempered or people who could easily make enemies.

"So, what's your business? Or do you really wish for immortal body?"
"No, I had asked Semeri to guide me in the lower-layer sightseeing tour, so I was brought here since this was the most interesting one."
"Ha? Tour?"
"Uhyo hyo hyo, first time I meet someone whimsical enough to come to this hell's pot for such reason."

They greatly laughed when I told them my business.

"Well alright. For the past thousand year here, there were only guys with dazzling wish like wanting an immortal body, or the lost knowledge."
"And the rest were『Heroes』who mistook us as demon lords, coming here to subjugate us but got killed themselves instead."

I can't read their expression at all, but I can feel that they're fed up.

For the time being, since they had welcomed me, I presented them powder-type cannons and muskets, that were only good as fertilizers for my storage.
I was worried whether the Item Box could take out the cannons, but the Item Box's entrance changed for an instant when I tried taking it out, and I was able to pull it out.

"Oh, that's rare."
"This one is a cannon I designed when I was at Furu empire. Slimes that could absorb magic were multiplying greatly, so I designed this to exterminate them."

So Armor-shi was an engineer of Furu empire huh.
It was the empire that the Wild Boar King destroyed if I'm not mistaken.

The souvenirs were more popular than I thought they'd be, so they're going to let me tour the museums that are located in the closed space.

◇

Corpse dive to a golden door that's floating in mid-air without any support.
It seems to be a teleport door, Corpse's luminous point in the map and radar has disappeared.

When I search for him in the marker list, his location is displayed as [UNKNOWN].
I try to use [Clairvoyance] magic, but there is no effect like when I tried to peek at True Ancestor's castle.

Following Armor and Semeri, I dive into the golden door.
When I check the map, it displays, [Area without Map].
I've seen this before--right, it was like this too when I was trapped inside Zen's shadow.

The inside is a vast white world that continues on forever.

Numerous cuboid-shaped 50-meter high buildings are standing at fixed intervals.

"Is this place created with space magic?"
"No, this space is created by Yuika's unique skill for me. We don't have to worry about gods peeking at us here you see."

I imagine god have the job of peeking at the lower world from above the cloud.
Oops, I have something else to confirm before that.

"By the way, is this person called Yuika a reincarnated person too?"
"Yea, that's right. However, unlike me, Yuika is not a human, but born as a『Little Oni-Kin (Goblin)』. Afraid of other people after having through some terrible things, Yuika stayed hidden indoor in the domain they created themselves."
<TLN: Using 'they' for 3rd person here since the raw doesn't specify gender.>

Goblin huh. This is the first Goblin without 'Demi' I've heard.
However, a woman reincarnating as a goblin.... It's too pitiful I feel like crying. This Yuika might be a man though.

"Yuika is docile but a good child you know? Even listening to my love consultation."

Semeri followed-up. Since she's stupid cute, she must have pressed on even after she was refused and then they became good friends.
I'll present her some magic sword for her to fight Ban later.

"Oy, I've gone and brought you here and all, tour properly won't ya!"
"Hyo hyo hyo, how patronizing. Even though you just want to show off."

Ignoring the two who have begun to quarrel peacefully, I tour various articles in the museum.
Pistols and rifles that I've seen somewhere before, submachine guns, mortars, and hand-grenades--they're all weapons, hey.

The successive buildings are decorated with aircrafts of both monoplane and biplane reciprocating engine, and tanks. Unlike the tank I've seen on the ground, as far as I can judge, it has enough power to make Semeri has a hard time in a battle between them.

While listening to Corpse who's happily doing an explanation in front of a 200-meter class battleship, I catch sight of something interesting outside the window.

"Is that perhaps a railroad?"
"Ou, that's right. It was the main cause that made me got pursued by the god."

It seems Corpse was reincarnated as a prince of a small country 3000 years ago. He built one of the great empire in the continent at the time with the unique skills and military knowledge that he had, but--

"For the sake of stable goods' circulation and information network in the empire, I created radio towers and railroad system but....It seems to have infuriated the god, you see."

Rice-producing regions were consumed by swarms of locust, drought happened, natural disasters like earthquake and volcano assailed like they were in bargain sales.

--There's a limit to even absurdness.

The empire endured for 10 years even with such states, but an oracle conveyed that the cause was the technologies that Corpse had made, so the empire was split and he was assassinated.
Although, he had surmised that before the assassin came, so he had prepared the ritual to become [King Mummy] beforehand.

"Even with this body, the apostles of gods kept persistently chased after me. They finally stopped, that was as long as I live a secluded life deep in the labyrinth as the condition."

When Armor heard that, he laughed like he was yawning.

"This guy held all of mankind hostages ya know? He made a mountain heap of nuclear weapons, 『Don't come after me if you don't want mankind destroyed』 he said."

I thought it was a joke, but since Corpse snorted like like he was cranky, without denying it, it's probably a true story.
Threatening the god sounds absurd. As expected of the man who built an empire in one generation.

According to him, the gods used their miracle to transform all radioactive materials that could become the main component into lead, so mining them is impossible in this world.
Since even his unique skill [Metal Creation] can't create Uranium nor Plutonium, there's no nuclear weapon that remains now.
Good, I wouldn't want a fantasy world to have nuclear winter.

I wanted to make nuclear reactor with magic tools, but it seems to be impossible.
Hydrogen exist, so I probably can emulate nuclear fusion by altering it into deuterium, but the god might chase me too if I make it.

I've got the proof of the Dog-head demon lord's story in an unexpected place.
It seems that interferes will come if someone is going to greatly advance the civilization.

That was dangerous since I had planned to make a railroad made of stone in order to improve the circulation of goods.
In exchange of giving Corpse all kinds of magic metal he wanted, I got several blueprints and books from him, and then we left his museums behind.

Part 17 - Desperate Struggle in the Subterranean Volcano?!

Satou's here. It's important to drive safely. Inspect the car before getting in, fasten your seatbelt, check the car's surrounding and then depart--there might be only a few people who know this much, but I think safe driving is important.

◇

"Ooh, so this vehicle can go this fast!"
"Uhyo hyo hyo, oy, you have a death wish? Semeri and me can restore ourselves even if we're cut to pieces or become minced meat, but it'll be all over for you, y'know?"
"--I'm driving safely you know?"

I'm safely driving a highly mobile vehicle--its tires and frame are that of a big military jeep--borrowed from Corpse.
I found it when we were visiting Armor's residence, and I got it to become the touring leg after asking him earnestly.
It's been awhile since I drove an automobile, there are some differences between driving it and a golem vehicle that imitates a carriage.

I make a sharp turn while feeling the roar of the engine with my whole body.
There's too much force, the rear wheels are slipping--the grip is worse than I thought. It can't be helped since the ground is hard rocks I guess?
I enjoy the driving while secretly supporting the running car's frame with [Magic Hand].

"Awesome! It's completely different than Armor's and Corpse's driving!"

Semeri who's in back seat is getting too excited, she's hugging my head from behind.
Unfortunately, the seat is obstructing, the blissful tactile is to be postponed.

"Don't lump me with this self-proclaimed 'safe-driving' guy! I'm a hardcore gold license!"

--Self-proclaimed he said.
I wanted to argue, but I'd likely bite my tongue if I did so, so I ignored Armor's impolite cry.

I've marked the course in the map anyway, and I'm driving while checking out the scenes of the underground, in a way it's safer than with a navigator.
I make a short work of obstacles and monsters with [Flexible Swords] and [Magic Hands] combo which have gone ahead while also putting them into Storage, so there's no problem on that front.

The speed feels a bit too fast, but since it shouldn't even be more than 100 KM/H, I'm slightly upset at being called a death wisher.
Compared to moving with Flash Drive, this speed is comparable to not moving.

Only Semeri and Armor ride with me, Corpse has started to work with the legendary-class magic metal I gave him.

Thanks to the high-mobility vehicle, the underground tour is going well.

Sightseeing a waterfall with one kilometer drop in a small area, sightseeing an enigmatic space where spherical water drops are floating around, burning down with laser the field of mustard flowers that were in full bloom in a small area, we toured attractions in the lower layer in short time despite such slightly harassing places.

◇

"Stop the car behind that rock."

I stop the car as instructed by Armor.
This is the big area where the Evil Dragon family live. Not only Evil Dragons, there are also such monsters as Basilisks and Flare Scorpions.

"It's always smelly here, I don't like it."

Semeri grumbles while getting off the car.

"Is this the smell of sulfur?"
"Yeah, that's right--I know you're expecting it, but sorry, there's no hot spring here."

To see through my mind, as expected of a Japanese person.
However, is the warm air around here not because of hot springs?
I follow Armor from behind while putting my overcoat into the Item Box.

The temperature goes up after we've passed through several rock gates.
The heat currently feels like in midsummer. The sexy Semeri who's wearing bikini-like clothing is the only gain.

"Nice ain't it?"
"Hot is nice sometimes indeed."
"You guys are strange."

I approve of Armor's words while advancing ahead.
Semeri is puzzled, but it'd be troubling if the salvation disappeared because she noticed, so I keep silent. Of course Armor is also not saying anything boorish.

After passing through the last door, we've finally arrived at the largest hall in this large Area.

"Dear me, what a superb view."
"Umu, it stimulates men's romance."

There, lavas are gushing out like geysers, red streams are flowing like rapid currents in a big river between the rocks.
Since there are lethal gas here, I deal with it using [Canopy] and [Air Control] magic.

The monsters that are emitting red light in the lava make for a good atmosphere.

Let's hunt some later and give it as souvenirs to Liza and the others.

"Now then, help me out a bit."
"Are we going to mine ores?"
"No, we're running out of sulfur, so we're replenishing it. Corpse can make normal ores from lump of clay, so ya don't need to mine them. Fire stones fall here sometimes, so look for it if there's one."

Fumu, fire stones huh.
There are a lot of demand for it since the military use it for fire wand and the like, maybe I should gather some.
I search the map for fire stones in the neighborhood to mark them. There are too many hits, my eyes hurt.
I search it again while limiting it to only ones that are bigger than a certain size--found a lot of huge human-sized fire stones in the bottom of a lava pit nearby.

Since it looks like my clothes and shoes would burn if I got too close, I protect them with magic power. I try imitating Liza's magic armor, but it's quite difficult.
I pick only one huge fire stone, and gather several dozens of fist-sized ones around it.
I used [Clairvoyance] and [Magic Hand] combo to pick them up since entering the lava seemed hot.

"Oy, Kuro. You'll fall if you lean so much."
"Don't die without permission! I will defeat and make you my servant after all!"

Armor and Semeri called me as it seemed to them that I was admiring the lava.
I apologize to the two and join them harvesting the sulfur.
These yellow materials are sticking around the crevices, so gathering them is easy. I collect them into a big bag by using metal tongs, and then give it to Armor after I've got certain amount.

"Shiiit."
"Is it the kid?"
"No, it's the parent."

It seems Armor and Semeri have noticed the Evil Dragon that's come nearby.
The Evil Dragon spreads its wing threateningly, but it's approaching here by walking on the lava.

"I wonder why is it not flying?
"Ah, that one's--"
"Because Corpse made it a target for his anti aircraft vehicle."

Semeri explained to me as if covering it. Her voice sounds not composed somehow.
However, it was attacked with an anti aircraft vehicle huh. Since it wasn't in the line up they showed me earlier, I'll ask him to show it after I've finished my business in the Royal Capital.

"Oy, let's scram, Semeri, Kuro."

"Yeah, Ban-sama and Corpse aren't here, we'll lose if we fight it seriously."

Semeri runs to the entrance with good speed. Armor is following her from behind while letting out noisy sound.

A dark red shadow jumped over me while pushing hot wind, and landed in front of the entrance.
It's not that big. It's about 80 meters long including the tail. Its smaller than the Black Dragon Heiron even though its level is high.
It's said that it was attacked with an anti-aircraft vehicle, but it's not like its wings are full of holes, seems it was just approaching us carefully.

"Semeri, buy me a bit of time. I'll change to Rock Golem."
"Geh, don't be unreasonable."

Semeri objected with trembling voice to Armor.
I'm slightly interested with [Lesser] dragons, so I'll take the charge of buying the time.

『Dragon, my name is Kuro. A friend of the Black True Dragon Heiron.』

I introduce myself so using dragon language.

The Evil Dragon did a roar that resembled Heiron's, but it seemed to be a mere cry, I couldn't understand its meaning. I didn't get any new language skill either of course.
Having a conversation really is not possible huh.

Semeri creates a one-handed sword with blood like White Princess did.
I heard something falling, and then saw Armor's armor crumbled down to the ground. In exchange, the rocks around it are gathering as if they have will.

I try to change my title to [Dragon Slayer].
I feel that the Evil Dragon's attention gets directed toward me. His atmosphere that seemed like a cat playing with a mouse until just now disappears, I feel a gaze full of hatred against one's enemy pricking me.

This one is like how monsters react to [Monster Slayer] huh.
Next, I changed my title to [Natural Enemy of Dragon Race]. I see fear in the dragon's eyes. The dragon looks at its surrounding in panic, trying to find a way to escape.

Semeri who jumped out to attract its attention got herself flown to the wall with a single casual swing of the dragon's arm.
The name of the Rock Golem that Armor had created became [Armor].
Apparently, he changed his possession to it.

In desperation, the Evil Dragon spitted flame breath toward me.
--Slow. The breath is coming at the speed of a flame thrower stage show. The arm of the Rock Golem that has just stood up is baked by the breath and broken down.

I use the Flexible Shield that's been deployed to block the breath--it stopped it.
The black dragon Heiron's breath destroyed two pieces of Flexible Shield in an instant, yet the Evil Dragon's breath seems to barely break through one Flexible Shield.

I pick one part of the Rock Golem that's been destroyed, and throw it to the Evil Dragon's forehead.
It was a clean hit because I aimed when it was stiff after the breath attack.

I guess checking the differences between True Dragon and Lesser Dragon is enough with this. It'd feel like bullying the weak if I did too much.
Oh right, let's try changing the title to [Friend of the Black Dragon] for the last one.

◇

"--What did you do Kuro."
"It's a trade secret."

I hadn't thought that the Evil Dragon would take a submissive pose like a dog. I've also acquired additional titles, [Dragon Tamer] and [Dragon Knight (Dragoon)].

I'm using the Dragon Knight title right now, and currently on a sightseeing flight in the hall while riding on the back the Evil Dragon.
Of course, I've taken photographs in this sightseeing flight.

When we're flying over its nest, Semeri waves her hand toward the Evil Dragon's family.
An Evil Dragon that seemed to be the eldest son came attacking us, but it seemed the parent was far stronger than him, the parent fell the son back to the nest with one blow of its tail after avoiding the eldest son's breath.

Apparently the dragon was going to present me with treasures on its nest, but it was not like I was troubled with gold after all this time, so I just picked a bit of rare materials called fire crystal and fire drop, which were of fire-stone kind. Of course I secretly collected fragments of scales and claws that had been dropped in the nest.

I felt bad only receiving things, so I processed the gold with [Forge] and [Mold] magic to make accessories that could be equipped by the dragons.
Dragons do seem to like glittering things after all, they look ecstatics when they've put on the accessories.

Since Semeri looked very envious, I make her a matching accessory from one part of gold received from the dragons.

We leave the hall with the evil dragon family seeing us off.

Now then, I'll miss the chance to see a katana smith in action if we don't get back to Ban's castle soon.
I step on the gas pedal of the high-mobility vehicle a teeny bit deeper under the guise of the word, 'safe-driving'.

Part 18 - Oni

Satou's here. Speaking of goblins, they're standard beings in fantasy works along with Orcs and Kobolds, but they're originally a normal fairy that likes to jest and do mischiefs.
Come to think of it, they're depicted as intellectual midgets in the story of the super famous magician boy.

◇

"Oops, stop the car here. Yuika would get angry if you damage the flower garden."
"Okay."

After finishing the sightseeing flight, we hurried the vehicle in order to make it in time for Ban's katana smith demonstration, but the course was changed with a few words from Semeri, "Stop by at Yuika's place."
There is no way I can refuse the person who's given me a feast for my eyes with the wonderful wild dance reflected on the back mirror.
Of course Armor didn't object too.

"I will wait here, you two go ahead."
"What? Armor won't go?"
"The young Yuika would cry again if I did."

What's this, is Goblin Yuika a Mrs with a child?
I had arbitrarily imagined that a female shut-in would be a shy unmarried woman.

"I should have prepared some sweets if I knew there was a child."
"Hm? Yuika isn't a child y'know? However, she does like sweet things, so you should bring her some if you come again."

Huh? Our conversation doesn't match.

"Doesn't she have a child?"
"She doesn't y'know? Ban-sama told me that Yuika has『Multiplepersonality』."
"It's multiple personality. When Yuika experiences painful things, she will leave the memory in the old personality and then change into a newly created personality. It's a story that sounds like it comes from manga, but it's the truth."

It seems the old personality is like the spirit on your back, they can only be a spectator.
When the main Yuika personality sleeps, it seems they can posses her and resurface.
It's a setting that was often used in old manga and anime.
In a sense, it's like how high-elves like Aze-san use the world tree, but this Yuika can do it herself.

While leaving the Armor to house-sit, we advance through the flower garden.
Of course, since I don't want to trample the multicolored flowers that are in full bloom in this flower garden, I fly above the ground with Sky Drive while carrying Semeri under my arm.

◇

"Kuro, the violet flowers over there are shaped in hexagram right? Please land on the center there."

In accordance to Semeri's instruction, I land on the ground.
There's probably an area that's similar to the Corpse's museums nearby here.

"So, where do we enter?"
"We don't. Wait a minute."

Since Semeri is greatly inhaling air, I quickly cover my ears.
As expected, she began to shout, "Yuika", in loud voice. Noisy.

The call seems to be a replacement for the intercom, the flowers that have shaped the hexagram begin to shine lightly, and then six semi-transparent doors appear floating in the light.

The doors are written in characters from Earth, five of them are written with, "A Miss", "Going to Hell", "It's a trap", "Don't enter", and "DEATH".
And then, the last one is "Welcome".

I personally think that all of them seem to be a trap.... But my [Crisis Perception] skill and [Trap Discovery] skill tell me that only the "Welcome" is safe.

"Err, I believe this one should be correct!"

Semeri pointed at "Going to Hell", full of confidence.
I catch the neck of Semeri who was going to dive straight to the hell's door with a bold face, stopping her.

"What're you doing!"
"That one's wrong."
"How do you know?!"

I didn't answer, and dived to the "Welcome" gate while bringing Semeri along.

◇

"Oh! It's really correct! You're amazing Kuro!"

When I asked the frolic Semeri how she usually did it, she answered that she would repeat until she got the correct one.
It seems she would turn into mist or bat when she fails to get away and then repeat it.
She was vexed since it usually took her four tries before she hit the correct one.

"Why won't the other party meet you instead?"
"Yuika is a『Niit』, so she absolutely won't come out she said."

Shouldn't it be called a shut-in instead of Neet I wonder.
That aside, just as I've expected, this is an [Area without Map] like Corpse's museums.

When I check this are with All Map Exploration, there's no one here besides us.

"There's no one here?"
"Yeah, Yuika is timid, so we won't arrive until another eight of the same gate."

So it's ninth power of six in total--around 10.000.000s I guess?
How cautious.

After traveling through nine gates, we finally arrive at the space where Yuika is.

There are a Japanese house with with a small field and bamboo thicket nearby.
Chickens are pecking their fodder in the courtyard facing the veranda, onions and radishes are hung on the eaves.

I use [All Map Exploration] magic, and acquire the information about Yuika.
Just as Corpse's said, Yuika's race is [Little Oni-kin (Goblin)]. I had expected it to be written as 'High Goblin', but it was the normal one.
By the way, [Little Oni-kin (Goblin)] is not the [Youma] (ghost/apparition) kind that usually appears in fantasy stories, but a [Fairy Tribe] that's like the elves.

Her age is the same as Corpse, but I'm not insensitive enough to fuss over a woman's age.
Compared to Aze, there's no great difference between everyone.

Unexpectedly, her level is only 50.
She doesn't have any normal skill or gift, but her unique skills are ludicrous.

Starting with the [Create My Garden] skill that's created this space, there are 13 of them--almost twice as much even compared to the Dog-head Demon Lord.
Even if she's undergone inflations, this too much.
I cursed the gods that I hadn't even met yet.

◇

"I've come! Yuika!"

Semeri calls toward the Japanese residence with cheerfulness that break the atmosphere of this place.

"Semeri? I've made some delicious takuan. Take it back to Onii-chan Ban okay."
"Geh, takuan is a no no. Ban-sama's beauty would turn yellow."

Yuika who opened the sliding door and came out talked to Semeri with a refreshing voice that doesn't match her age.
Impossible--it's a beautiful girl?!

White transparent skin, silk-like lustrous straight violet hair that extends to the floor.
Although she's not at Lulu's level, she's beautiful enough to rival Arisa's and Mia's beauty.

She would have looked like a human if it were not for her slightly pointed ears that resembled an elf's, and two small horns on her forehead near the temples of her head.
Her slender delicate body lacks undulation like the elf's, but that point is whatever since I'm not into little girls.

"Mou, it's the taste of Japan--"

It seems Yuika has finally noticed me.
She didn't at first due to Semeri's impact, but Yuika's violet pupils have caught sight of me.

Her expression looks happy for an instant, but then her face freezes while still smiling.
Hmm? I didn't hear about her hating men or something.

I had a feeling that her mouth which was flapping slightly spoke "Ichirou".
However, the words that actually reach my ears are different.

"--Infinite Chain"

Purple ripples surround Yuika's body.
The crisis perception reacts like never before.

Countless small black dots appear around Yuika.

They became jet black bullets that assailed me all at once.
One of it is only as big as a bead ball, but AR indicator tells me that those jet black bullets are micro blackholes.

I surely would have been swallowed if I was late activating Flash Drive even a little.
I opened my mouth to ask for the reason, but the jet black bullets that are being endlessly created by Infinite Chain chase after me, puncturing huge hole on ground of the course where I was running away with Flash Drive.

I think Semeri who was late at escaping has been swallowed, but a vampire princess she is should be alright.
She likely would complain about it later, but she probably would forgive me if I gave her a magic sword.

I wanted to converse with Yuika, but my words don't reach as the jet black bullets swallowed it.
I'd like to talk with [Telephone] magic, but this magic won't connect if the other party reject it.
I want the advanced magic [Force Telephone].

I destroy the chasing jet black bullets with [Break Magic], but the other party isn't losing at creating more.

I could make the initiative with [Laser] and [Implosion] if the other party were a demon lord, but I can't do that to a beautiful girl.

Normally, she should have depleted her magic power by now, but her [Mana Loop] and [Mana Spring] unique skills have probably optimized and supplied her magic power.

Dang you cheat.

Just how many unique skills does she use in parallel.
Since three violet ripples are stroking Yuika's body, though I don't know their nature, she's probably using three kind of unique skills.

I wonder if she's alright doing such rashness?

In order to break the deadlock, I close in from her blind spot, and strike Yuika with my palm to make her faint

--that was the trigger of it all.

I should have escaped with all my power.
However, it's too late now.

My careless action becomes the impetus that brings forth [The Worst Demon Lord] who can use 13 kind of Unique Skills, surpassing the Dog-head Demon Lord who was fit to be called an Evil God.

The Goblin Demon Lord, [White Oni Sovereign], was born that day.

Part 19 - Oni (2)

Satou's here. I like this movie genre called disaster. Seeing the protagonists struggle through adversities coming one after another with their wisdom, bravery, luck and deliberation is the best.
However, I sure have never seen a disaster movie where all of the characters are saved.

◇

I should have noticed the fear reflected on Yuika's eyes.

My palm which was striking Yuika to faint her is stopped by a hard magic wall.
It's probably the unique skill [Automatic Defense (Guardian)].

I somewhat remember this sensation.
It's similar with the [Fortress] function on Nana's equipment.

--Then, it's the weak point.

While my palm is still lightly hitting the defensive wall, I twist my body further and strike with more power. At the moment of impact, I release a lump of pure magic power.

>[Armor Penetrate] Skill Acquired
>[Mana Strike] Skill Acquired

I shot it out since there was nothing to lose anyway, but it seems to be the right idea, I've successfully made Yuika faint.

--'kitt', I heard such sound.

I catch the delicate Yuika who's fallen with my hand.

--'bzzt' sound comes out. Where is it from?

I pull Yuika who's lost her consciousness, fallen like a doll and put her body on my other arm.

I heard the last sound of the fall (Trigger) right at this time.

--'pakin'.

I think it was a light sound such as that.
I should've noticed it at the first sound....

◇

--Crimson light is dancing in the sky.

Reflecting the pale light that fills the space.

--light clothing as if it's an angel robe feebly dances in the sky.

It regains its freedom after the wedge has disappeared.

--A pair of hills exposed in broad daylight.

A gentleman I am, I turn my eyes away from the meager undulation.
I heard the small sound of the broken clothing clasp falling to the ground.

The eyes of Yuika who should've fainted suddenly opens wide.

"You damn pervertttttttt!!"

I narrowly evade the fist that comes striking as she awakens.
Looks like her personality's changed.
Come to think of it, they said that she would change into [the other person] when she fainted was it.

"Don't evade ittttttt!"

Violet ripples are swirling around Yuika's body, and a fist that's a world difference than the one just now is coming at me.
It's probably the [Peerless Strong Arm] unique skill, but please stop with the rapid strikes.
Good grief, what'd you do if you became a demon lord after using too much unique skill.

I evade the rain of literal certain-death fist attacks by using the skill [Foreseeing: Anti-Personnel Combat].
Yuika's level has changed from 50 to 55. Half of her skill composition has also changed to hand-to-hand combat-related skills.
I had thought that her personality would change, but I didn't think that her level and skill would too.

--However, please be aware of it soon.

When there was some distance between us, I made a gesture of striking my own chest with my finger.
With my action, It seems Yuika has finally remembered that her chest is exposed.

"Gunununununu...."

Her face is distorted in shame, she pins the chest cloth with one of her hands and groans frustratingly.
Alright, she's stopped moving, let's try talking to her.
I take a mantle out of the Item Box and give it to Yuika with [Magic Hand].

"Use it."

The mantle that's opened in mid-air covers Yuika.

"Kukukukuku"

I can hear Yuika chuckling under the mantle.
She brushes away the mantle--and then jet-black dress that's different from just before appears. It's the so-called gothic dress. It matches well with her white skin and violet hair.
Her pupils which were lilac colored have also changed to scarlet and blue color of heterochromia.

Moreover, Yuika's level has changed once again. It's slightly fallen at level 52, and her hand-to-hand combat skills have also become that of magic warrior kind starting with darkness magic.

Yuika covers half of her face with one of her hand whose fingers spread, and then she continues to laugh while looking down.

--Don't tell me, it's the symptom of demon lord-fication?

"...Hahaha"

Her eyes that can be seen between her fingers glint, and then Yuika slowly raises her face while continuing to laugh and leaning backward.
Her sharp glance is fixed at me as if it's going to pierce me.

"Haaahhahhahahaha"

--Three steps of laughs?!

As if expecting my surprise, she points her hand that was covering her eyes with a bang and begins her introduction.

"I am the descendant of the oppressed darkness, the miko demon of the sixth heaven, the last noble of Oni-kin."

She changes her pose, and puts a moment pause.

"My name is Foilnis La Belle Fille! Those who fear and honor me call me as the『Jet Black Beauty Dark La Princesse』!"

Un, she's a chuunibyou.
Still, please stop mixing French and English. Judging from the nuance, there's also Germanic too I guess?

Denying her seems like it'll be annoying, guess I'll ride on it.

"Nice to meet you,『Jet Black Beauty』Foilnis La Belle Fille-dono. I am called Kuro, a friend of Ban and Corpse."

When I introduced myself, Yuika No.3 laughed scornfully.

"A friend of Ban and Corpse? Someone who holds the title of hero, pretending to be a friend of my fellow darkness brethren!"

Yuika is enraged while producing illusion of flame from her crimson eye.
She can see my hidden titles huh?

I don't see any unique skill that fits it, but the [Divine Sight] one seems suspicious.
I had thought that it was surely an attacking magic eye kind.

"I am the strongest magic warrior who have consigned numerous demon lords and heroes to oblivion! My level has become less than half of it was generations ago, but I will teach you that level difference is not the definitive difference in battle!"

No no, I think six times level difference is [Definitive] enough.
If I have to say from watching the growth of our girls, 10 level difference with the opponent is the limit in a fight. If the difference in level is 20, it can't even be called a fight, that is as long as you don't have equipment and skill composition with overwhelming advantage against the particular opponent.

Yuika No.3 still looks at my status and curses at it even now.

"Fuhn, a parade of fake names huh. Trismegistus, Michaelangelo, Echigoya, Ichirou, Nobunaga--how many famous people are you intending to pretend to be."

No, one of it is my real name. Though there's a celebrity with the same name indeed.
And, Yuika No.3 isn't one to say that of all people.

"You shouldn't be one saying that right? Yuika."
"T, that's the mana (true name) that should be kept secret from the world! The name, 『Yuiitsu (The Only) Kami (God) - (Yuika)』, that's cursed by the gods is not to be spoken out loud! My name is Folnis La Belle Fille!"

Oops, I inadvertently retorted even though I had admonished myself.
However, she doesn't have [Curse of the Gods] on her title or abnormal status looking at her stat, is this another [Self-proclaimed] one?

Yuika No.3 was enraged for a second, but she quickly regained her composure and questioned me.

"Let me ask you! The nameless hero who bears many names! What is your objective!"

--Objective?

In this case, my objective should be visiting Yuika's house.

"Escorting Vampire Princess Semeri, I just came to greet the woman who came from the

same『Former』world as me."
"What? Even though you're a hero, you didn't come here to subjugate me?"
"As long as the other party won't cause harm to our girls, I won't subjugate without question even if it's a demon lord."

In fact, even with the Dog-head demon lord, I probably wouldn't be hostile toward him if he had no intention of harming Sera, Head-Miko and the others.

"--I can't believe it. My skill tells me that your are speaking the truth...."

Yuika No.3 is at a loss for words.

Looks like she judge whether it's the truth with [Fathom] skill.

◇

"Umu, I haven't had pizzas for a long while."
"What do you want me to bake next?"
"It's enough, I'm already full."

We reconciled after that somehow, and then, responding to the hungry Yuika No.3's request, I entertained her with pizzas and carbonated drink.
I had only one pizza that was reserved for midnight-snack remaining, but losing to Yuika No.3 who earnestly demanded for more, I baked more with impromptu furnace made with earth magic.

It seemed Semeri was just sent to a different locked space by Yuika, she appeared safely and then began to wrestle with the pizza in silence. I have to stop her soon since her exposed stomach has swelled.

"The newest Yuika is quite good at cooking, but Kuro's cooking is very dangerous."
"Yeah, he's better than the cooks at Ban-sama's place."

Yuika drinks the carbonated drink that's flavored with sugar and fruit juice while praising my cooking skill.
Since Semeri unexpectedly disliked carbonated drinks, I took out some Brownie Wine for her.

"I never thought that I would ever eat pizza in another world y'know. I want you to reproduce cola next time please."
"Let alone the recipe, I don't even know the ingredient for cola."
"Isn't it cola fruit?"

I've never heard of cola being a fruit.
Yuika No.3 ambiguously replies back, "Keep researching."

"I'm sorry for the newest Yuika earlier."
"It's fine already. You've just apologized now."

Yuika No.3 who can't move with full stomach speaks some meek words.
Of course she was talking about the matter with Yuika No.1 who attacked preemptively.

It seemed she was in panic since she had been taught by the pleasant reincarnated underground bunch that heroes were dangerous so she attacked first.

Heroes would have shout "You damn goblin demon lord!" and attacked if they met Yuika No.3 anyway, so there's no point blaming Corpse and the others about this.
Moreover, it's not only heroes, demon lords have also challenged Yuika No.3 in order to call themselves [The strongest demon lord]. Yuika No.3 was level 99 at that time, so she defeated them in her spare time.

I had thought that it was another made-up story from her chuunibyou, but Yuika has the titles of [True Hero] and [Goblin Demon Lord]. Apparently it's true.

Although, she hasn't actually become a [Demon Lord] even though she has the title. She was arbitrary called that by some opponent who came challenging her which resulted in her getting the title.
By the way, the title of Yuika and the others seen from appraisal skill is [Recluse]. She must have stayed indoors for a long time.

I thought that her level had decreased since she was slacking off, but she told me that her level decreases by 30 whenever she creates a new main personality. It seems her skills are lost along with it too.
Their skill and level can go back if they get hold of the main body from the main personality, but it seems the level can only go back by 20% of the main personality at most. Moreover, there's also some rule about affinity.

"By the way,『Jet-black Beauty (Dark La Princesse)』Folnis La Belle Fille. This place has turned into abysmal state, do you have any place to sleep today?"
"Uu, it's embarrassing when someone actually calls me that..."

She's happy when she's called in an exaggerated dramatic way, but chuuni name being plainly and seriously spoken out is embarrassing.
I understand well as someone who's contracted the disease once.

"Why don't you get a new name? If you had enough of Western-style name, why not Japanese style or Chinese?"
"You give me, Kuro."
"Right then--"

We came together with Yuika No.3 to Corpse's castle to order a new hermitage for Yuika, and then we went toward Ban's castle.

Yuika No.3's new chuuni name is [White Oni Sovereign].
I got it from her white skin.

Thus, the sightseeing tour of the labyrinth's lower layer ended peacefully like this despite the

little trouble--.

Part 20 - The Pleasant Fellowship of the Underground Labyrinth

Satou's here. It's said that the grudge of food is terrifying, but I wonder just when it applies.
I wonder if it's to the guy who ignores the rule and cuts in line in a shop where you have to line up?

◇

"You've finally come. Good grief, it's very late dearu."
"Excuse me, there was a bit of trouble."

True Ancestor Ban rebuked me when I arrived at the workshop in the innermost part of the castle.
Coming late for something I've requested myself, there's no excuse for it.

It'd be problematic if the furnace got overheated, so he probably couldn't wait for more than two hours after the promised time.
The reason why he's begun re-heating the fire after it had cooled off must be because he couldn't bear the pressures from the vampire princesses who wanted a mithril katana.

It's like when I was before the barbecue set that had been cooled, enduring the line of sight from the beastkin girls who were waiting for the meat skewers that hadn't been grilled. You surely can't resist it.

"Take a good look dearu."
"Is it alright?"

Ban presents me the blade that's on the tongs.
The hue color looks like a Japanese sword that's just been taken from the bare heat, normal people will be scalded if they touch it.

I clad my body surface with magic power to deploy [Magic Armor]-like protection like when I did at the Evil Dragon's place. Managing it is quite difficult.
When I asked Liza the knack for [Magic Armor], she said, "Master has to softly squeeze it like, 'fuwatt', tightly. It'll be like, 'posatt', if master squeezes it too much, so please be careful not to make it become like 'gyuut'." such very hard to understand explanation came out.
I've become able to use it somehow from that explanation, but I'm only weaving magic power and the strength is weak, so it's not fit to be called [Magic Armor].

Getting back to the topic. I grab the Japanese Katana while I'm clad in magic power. Of course the grease on my hand doesn't transfer to it since my hand is covered in magic membrane.

I put the blade toward the lighting.
There, I noticed something that's not like a Japanese katana.

"Ban-dono, this blade has no ripple pattern you know?"
"Umu, the purity of the mithril that Kuro-dono had brought was very high, so there was no need for me to fold much dearu."

What's that got to do with the ripple?
The True Ancestor who saw me looking puzzled opened his mouth to explain about it.

"Essentially, forging by folding is--"
"Hear me! Young noble of darkness who is also my brethren, True Ancestor Ban!"

Yuika No.3 who came trotting from behind interrupted Ban's words with marvelous-looking face.

"To interrupt my words, even if you are the last princess of goblins--"

The True Ancestor criticizes Yuika No.3 impoliteness with a uselessly long speech.
However, Yuika No.3 swings a stick that looks like a short wand, and interrupts True Ancestor speech once again.

"I am going to talk about how I found one of the『Three Lost Treasures』, are you still going to assume that attitude?"

The True Ancestor's expression freezes in shock.
Yuika No.3 grins when she sees that.

However, since the thing on her hand is not a short wand, but a stick with starch syrup, she unfortunately ends up looking like a conspicuous idiot.
She was going to the kitchen with Armor earlier, that was probably when she snatched the starch syrup. Armor who was with Yuika No.3 isn't behind her.

"It cannot be!"
"Yes, it's precisely that!"

I take the spectator position without joining the conversation since I can somehow see the punchline.

"The aroma coming from that mouth, it's『Pizza』right?"

....So it's really about that.
I don't think it's something that needs to be discussed with such a serious face.

"Un, Kuro baked it for me."
"Kuro-dono what does this mean dearuka?"

It seems Yuika No.3 had gotten tired of it halfway through, she lightly left everything to me while licking the starch syrup.
True Ancestor draws closer to me with bloodshot eyes.

"D-did you find tomatoes dearuka?"
"Yeah, a remote village on the eastern side of Shiga Kingdom was cultivating it."

I push back the uselessly handsome face of True Ancestor that had come near me. Please pardon me from BL.
Don't demonstrate vampires' superhuman strength for things like this. You could have seriously injured someone if his level was low.

"I can't believe it! I had searched the land around there for years...."

It seems that people who had run away from the war between the eastern small countries and the weasel country came drifting to that particular area, so it probably didn't exist at his time.
I stop talking since I'm not into comforting men, and then the topic of conversation changes to Armor who's entered from the opened door.

The head maid, Mrs. Fedraluka and a plain woman who seems to be from the same generation as her follows behind Armor. The woman appears to be this castle's chef.
She probably came after hearing Armor's and Yuika No.3's talk about pizza.

"Ban-sama, please forgive me for entering your workplace."
"Fedraluka huh. I do not mind."

The chef who had followed behind Mrs. Fedraluka also talked, but it was just as I had expected.
Since I already have the written recipes for pizza and simple cheese in my storage from Puta town, I give it to her. Together with tomato seeds and a paper written with the way to raise them.
I actually wanted to give them the seedlings since raising it from seeds is going to be hard, but I didn't have any left since I had already used them all for experiments.

"--then, we will arrange it as such."
"Umu, I wait for the good news dearu."

After receiving various things, Mrs. Fedraluka and the woman left.
It seems the vampire princess who's good with earth magic will also cooperate to prepare all kinds of soil to grow the tomatoes.

Incidentally, I also told him that I would get fresh tomatoes in a few days since we're growing tomatoes at the experimental farm outside the labyrinth city.

"Then, in order to protect the experimental farm from pests such as thieves, I should dispatch my followers, the crimson bats, and burning-blood wolves to protect it..."
"Please be moderate about it okay."

Good grief, he seems to lose his restrain if it's about tomatoes.
I didn't expect him to be this kind of a glutton character.

◇

He has to endure with Sushi since I didn't have any ingredient left for pizza.
The fish were Piracucu-like fish that were swimming in the castle's canal. It had few bones, and tasted like sea bream. I've made the sushi with various kind of fish, since making only one is lonesome.

"Ho, you use some good wasabi."
"Umu, it's superb. Eating good sushi like this make me crave for some big tuna."
"Kuro, omit the wasabi for my shares."

It was popular among the reincarnated people, but--

"Even if this is Ban-sama's preference, I will excuse myself from partaking..."
"This is a bit."
"...."

--The vampire princesses on-site are keeping their distance.

"Eating food raw, that's like a beast it's disgusting."
"Semerii?"
"Are you implying that Ban-sama is like a beast?"
"....tearing limb from limb, final decision."

The other vampire princesses seemed to be infuriated from the criticism that escaped Semeri's mouth, they caught her body with blood-made whips and took her away from the dining room.

They probably used Semeri as a pretext to leave this room that's filled with vinegared rice's smell.
Even White Princess was covering her face with a handkerchief all the time.

"Is there no sushi roll?"
"I can make some cucumber roll if you want."
"I'd like to eat tuna sushi roll."
"I want to eat normal sushi roll."

What Yuika means by normal sushi roll seems to be dried gourd sushi roll.
Still, Armor has only been requesting tuna for a while.

"I can't do that since I don't have the freeze-dried tofus and the dried gourds."
"Ban's castle has those freeze-dried tofus."

Hou? I had seen firm tofus in the royal capital, so there were freeze-dried tofus too huh.
I could probably get it if I look in the royal capital.

The True Ancestor's chef whom I helped would teach me the freeze-dried tofu recipe, so there's no problem even if I don't acquire it there.

Right then, True Ancestor made an explosive statement.

"Moreover, I have found the gourds during my search for tomatoes dearu."

--what'd he said?!

I inch closer to True Ancestor and ask him the location for that.
Gentlemanly of course.

"Spit it out! Where did you find it!"
"Would you cease it Kuro! I am not into men."

It seems finding it was difficult, True Ancestor isn't quite willing to talk about it.
Pushing back with his hand the face of someone who's asking gentlemanly is rude though.

"Wait, I don't have the map for it, but finding them is easy."
"So, where did you find it?"

I should be able to find the place with the map search function if I can narrow it down to a certain extent.
I can finally eat the sushi roll that I usually ate during lunch break again!

"You know the great river in the eastern part of Shiga Kingdom right?"

--Of course.
There's probably no one in Shiga Kingdom who doesn't know the great river flowing beside the Duchy Capital.

"Go to the end of the upstream source of that river."

Further away from Gururian City huh.

"Across the mountain to the north-northeast of that--"

Hmm? North-Northeast?

"There's a vast forest where the giants live. The gourds are growing wildly near the village where those giants live."

Isn't that.

--Muno territory!

To think that it was in the vast forest to the northwest of Muno City!

"The giants are hard to please. They trampled many of my follower wolves and ghouls that I brought in my search."
"It's alright, I have a way to deal with them."

If I'm not mistaken Karina-sama should be acquainted with the elder of the Giants' village, I'll ask her to support me if I fail at negotiating alone.

I promised Yuika the best sushi roll there is.

◇

"Umm, I am very sorry for losing my composure at that time."

A beautiful girl doing dogeza is very violent. The one being apologized ends up looking like the bad one instead.
I lightly clap Yuika No.1's shoulder and raise her head.

"It's alright already, No.3 has already apologized enogh."
"...No.3 is it?"

Oops, that was bad of me.

"The White Oni Sovereign--Folnis La Belle Fille or the girl who calls herself Dark La Princesse."
"Aah! You mean founder-sama!"

That's the first generation huh.

"Founder-sama stopped it didn't she. I was afraid and couldn't stop attacking even though I had noticed that you never attacked back."

It seems the girls can meet together in their dream, so they can exchange information with each other to an extent.
By the way, according to Yuika No.3, the goblin demon lord that Aze talked about seems to be a different person from her. She looked a bit sad, so it might be her acquaintance or a relative.

Looks like Yuika is going to rent a room in True Ancestor's castle until her dwelling is restored. The reason why it's not Corpse's or Armor's castle seems to be because she's afraid of ghosts.
I think Vampires are categorized as ghost themselves, but this place has a lot of normal people working in it so it must be comfortable for her.

She's not treated as freeloader since it seems she's going to make a space that's most suitable to grow tomatoes with her unique skill in return for the expense.

I wonder if she'll share one cultivation space for me too.
She'll probably do it if I ask her, but asking now will make it look like I'm bullying her, let's ask for it later.

Semeri who hadn't showed her face after being dragged away for saying "Disgusting" seems to have gone to the kitchen and snatched various food into the large bag she's holding.

It seems she's going back to her territory by hitching a ride on Armor's car.

I haven't visited Semeri's territory, so I make a promise to go there after returning from the Royal Capital.

"Come anytime. I'll welcome you myself, so come bringing a lot of good food."
"Yeah, leave it to me."

Asking for good food to [Come] instead of [Wait] is so Semeri-like.

Now then, if I don't get back to the mansion above ground soon, I will miss the departure to the royal capital.
I left the labyrinth's lower layer while being sent off by Yuika, True Ancestor and the others.

Part 21 - To the Royal Capital (1)

Satou's here. It's said that kids are mischievous since a long time ago, but maybe the kids today are either smart or sly, I feel that they make sure that the other party won't scold them before doing the prank.
You're forgiven for your prank only until you graduate primary school....

◇

After teleporting back to the mansion's basement, I climb the narrow stair to the entrance hall.
For some reason, the little girl maids have gotten excited while pointing outside the windows.

One little girl maid who heard the familiar sound of the closing basement door noticed me and then she came running.

"Master!　It's an『Airship』!　『Airship』! It's flying!"
"Cause it's an airship."
"That's true isn't it! It's amazing isn't it!"

I think it won't be an airship if it's not flying.
I'm pulled by the little girl maid toward the window. A large airship is floating above the labyrinth army's garrison.

It's the ship that I've delivered as Nanashi to the kingdom.

The flag of Shiga Kingdom is drawn on the airship's armored side, a small crest flag that signifies the passengers is raised on the bridge above the bow. I understood that that crest is of [Duke Bishtal] since I had been drilled about heraldry by the civil official Yurina when I got my peerage in Muno city.
If I'm not mistaken that duke is the nephew of General Eltal who commands the labyrinth army here.

We and every members of [Lion's Roar] who has captured the middle layer floormaster is going to board that airship to the Royal Capital.
It'd be nice if Duke Bishtal who's in bad term with Duke Oyugock won't pick a quarrel with me during the travel...
Well, a high-ranking noble like a duke probably won't be eccentric enough to pick a fight with a honorary noble of the lowest rank.

"You girls, the morning work isn't over yet. Get back to work quick!"

Ms. Miteruna who has appeared in the entrance hall out of nowhere roars, the little girl maids go back to their works like a scattered cloud.

"Good morning, master."

"Yeah, morning."
"There were three people last night. I have contacted the guard station."
"Is that so, thank you for your hard work."

The three people whom Ms. Miteruna mentioned are thieves who had trespassed the mansion in the middle of the night. There have been eight people in total with them now huh. It's a bit many.
I've installed Scarecrow No.11 on the mansion's roof to detect thieves.

I've left Ms. Miteruna to take care of the thieves caught today.
Even though the explorers who are guarding the mansion are only paid with one big copper coin a night, there are a lot of applicants. The midnight snacks that the little girl maids prepare seems to be famous. I wonder if there are a lot of lolicon among the explorers?

Most of the equipments are in my storage, Arisa's item box, and inside the magic bags though, so the things in the new underground storehouse which the thieves are aiming are all dummy magic tools.
The majority of those magic tools are the ones I've bought from my merchant acquaintances in the labyrinth city, and the items I've bought from the craftsmen in the tenement houses to support them in the early days.
Of course I've also mixed some decoration items that look like the genuine ones.

All those items worth more than 100 gold coins though, so it's probably still attractive even for dummies.
Even just the other day, there was a thief who used earth magic to make a small passage underground in order to invade the mansion.
Since I had just returned at that time, I arrested him after discovering him on the radar and handed him over to the authorities.
Now he's working hard improving the soil on the experimental farm outside the city as a crime slave.

The actual desirable magic item isn't located in the underground storehouse, but in my basement laboratory.
I have put a great sword with blade taken from a [Soldier Mantis]'s sickle remodeled with mithril and hihiirogane there. It's something that an average Red Iron explorer would die for.
This great sword is too big to get taken out of the basement normally, only people who have Item Box or a magic bag can get it out.

In other word, people who can steal this are limited.
If a thief who has Item Box is caught in the trap, there would be many things I can use them for.

The fact that I have magic bags is already well-known in the labyrinth city, so there's probably no one who thinks strange of it.

Well, let's leave that matter.
Rather, I wonder if Arisa and the others are ready?

"Has everyone woken up?"
"Yes, everyone has already finished dressing."

I don't think she's waiting for Ms. Miteruna to finish talking, but Arisa shows up while leading everyone from the door that can be seen opening from here.

Everyone is in their top form today.

"Ja ja~n, what do you think, it's lovely right?"

Arisa spins on the spot.

"Lovely, you're a lady."
"Mou! Why was it in monotone!"

Arisa is wearing an orthodox party dress, but she ends up looking like [a child who tries too hard]. The person herself seems to intend to look like lady, so I'm not going to throw some needless retort.
The elegant silver tiara on her head is shining.

The tiara is not the same genuine one that Princess Noja and the pink-haired Princess Meana were wearing, but it's a small light tiara that brides usually wear together with their wedding dress in the modern Japan.

Arisa's tiara is of a normal arabesque design, but the design on Pochi's tiara is of a puppy playing, and Tama's tiara has the figure of a stretching cat and a cat that's sharpening its claw. Every other member also has the tiara design that matches them each, but making them unexpectedly took some time.
It wasn't the time to work on it, but the time for everyone to decide on the design.

I only need to melt several silver coins for a tiara though, so it's not that expensive.
Apparently, the price of handmade things changes as more people see it, right now one tiara is worth several gold coins even though it was only one gold coin originally.
I'm slightly worried at just how much it will become as daughters of the nobles who will be seeing us off today see the tiara.

"Next one is Pochi nanodesu!"
"Tama too~?"
"You two are cute too."
"Wa~i" "Nanodesu!"

Pochi and Tama are wearing normal cute pink dresses.
The 'Shupi' and the 'Shutan' pose don't match their clothing.... It is cute though.

"Satou."

Mia is wearing an elf-like dress with a lot of bright green laces.
She was hesitating between the elf native dress and the miko-like clothes that Aze-san wore,

but it looks like she's picked the dress.

"You also look like a princess Mia."
"Nn."

Mia answered short, but she looks happy with reddened cheeks.

"Master, declaring the getting up greeting."
"Yeah, good morning."

Huh? Nana's greeting is different than usual.

Nana is wearing a polite yellow dress that unfortunately covers her chest.
Even though the one that I made at first had the cleavage section with enough offensive power to sink a country, it changed to the current one due to Mia's protest and Arisa's supervision.
I think Arisa doesn't understand the fine arts of adults.... No, I guess it's men's romance.

"Lying in wait for master's praise, so I whisper."
"You're more beautiful than usual today."

It's hard to read Nana since her expression hardly changes, but that face is for when she's elated, or rather excited.
She's probably looking forward to the departure for the Royal Capital.

"Thank you for waiting, Master."
"Master, good morning."

The last two to appear are Liza and Lulu in combat clothes. Lulu is wearing maid-like clothes so she's still good, but Liza is in a costume that makes her look like a complete knight.
I tried recommending her to wear dress many times over, but she told me that she wanted to go with combat clothes since she's going as a Mithril explorer. I've let Liza do as she pleases since it's rare for her to insist on something herself.

"Masita, morning."
"Good morning. Masu, no, Masita."
"You don't have to force yourself, you can call me Masuta okay?"
"No, I am alright. Masita."

Shiro and Crow greet me while flying around.

Huh? These children are also wearing formal clothes.
They should be staying in the labyrinth city, I wonder why? Have they dressed up to see us off?

Nana is avoiding my eye contact, but I firmly object them from tagging along.
I won't be too sweet on this.

◇

Urged by Ms. Miteruna, I go to the dress room in the bedroom to change into the ceremonial noble clothes.

Shiga Kingdom has all kind of customs being an old kingdom it is.
It was loosely upheld in the Duchy Capital and Muno Barondom, but custom is important in the Royal Capital among distinguished nobles who dominate the city.

On top of that, there are different ceremonial clothes depending on your peerage, so I have to be careful not to wear the wrong clothes and get myself in trouble uselessly.
The duke is going on board today, so I'll be wearing some slightly formal clothes. I'm wearing necktie-like decoration cloth (cravat) on my neck, but it looks smug and unpleasant.

After I've finished getting dressed, I check with Arisa while taking light breakfast together with everyone before our departure.

"Arisa, is the preparation for the luggage complete?"
"Of course duh!"

She really is a showa person

The conspicuous luggage are only the two suitcases and the three armor bags.
Any other item beside those are stored in the magic bags, Arisa's Item Box, and the storage space created by Arisa's space magic [Garage].

We pass through the door that little girl maids have opene and go outside.
Little girl maids and the orphanage children are surrounding the path toward the two carriages that are in front of the gate to see us off.

One of the two carriage is something I've borrowed from Baronet Dyukeli's family.
Since Baronet Dyukeli was interested with our carriage, I had given him this carriage which had the same look as ours after we had gotten along to a certain extent.

Lady Karina and the others have already gone to the place where the airship is anchored earlier since not everyone can get on the two carriages.

"""Please take care, Chevalier-sama."""

The children bowed in chorus together all at once.
I reply to them while walking toward the carriage.

"■■■ Breeze"

When we were halfway through the pathway, one of the orphanage children swung the short wand on his hand to use magic.
The wind that he's produced flips up the skirt of Arisa and the others, and the little girl maids.
I reflexively hug Lulu's and Nana's thighs to protect their skirts. I probably look like a sexual

harasser from other people's viewpoint.
However, the skirts of the girls that I didn't guard have flipped up.
The fact that most of those skirts are made of light cloth due to the hot temperature of the labyrinth city is probably another reason.

Mia and Arisa whom I didn't guard grandly raised their protest among the shrill screams.
Pochi and Tama seemed to find the flipped skirt amusing, they were, "Fluttering~", "Nanodesu!", delightedly.

The mischievous boys are pleased with their victory.

Far from scolding them, I was shocked instead.

There wasn't anyone who had the [Chanting], and [Magic] skills among the orphanage children at least.
Arisa and Mia did teach them words and magic during their break, but to think there are children who have become able to use it.... Damn you geniuses.

Shiro and Crow have also become able to use darkness and light magic, but these two children have the boost from power-leveling.
These orphanage children have reached the point where they can use magic and chanting without such cheat.
Putting aside the usage, I want to express my respect for their great effort and talent.

How enviable....

No, let's stop envying children.
It's not like I feel cheered up when I see Arisa scolded the kid and punches his head, dropping him to the ground, not at all.

After such cute happening, the carriage we're riding head toward the place where the Airship is anchored.

Part 22 - To the Royal Capital (2)

Satou's here. There's a scene where a lot of people are gathering to see moored airships in festive mood that remains in my memory, although I can't remember the reason.
The hand-made ice cream in that memory was really delicious.

◇

"Biig~?"
"It's really really amazing nodesu!"

Pochi and Tama who are bending their bodies outside on both side windows look up at the floating airship in high spirit.
Tama is fine, but Pochi's tail is buzzing and hitting me.

"Mwu."

Mia who's dissatisfied with the occupied windows opens the small window for conversing with the coachman and peeks outside.
Arisa, Lulu and Nana are in the other carriage in front of ours after losing the rock, paper, scissor game.
For some reason, Liza is sitting on the coachman's seat while carrying her spear. She sure loves high places, unexpectedly enough.

Outside the window, I can see people crowding to see us off.

People who have noticed the identity of the ones in the carriages cheer for us one after another, reminding me of the parade.
It seems there are a lot of people who cheer for Liza due to her sitting on the coachman's seat.

◇

"Satou-san, please enjoy this in the airship."
"Thank you, Zena-san."

I receive the parcel that Zena-san gives me.
The warmth is transmitted to my hands. Wonder if this handmade by Zena-san?

"Did Zena-san make this?"
"...Umm, that's err...."

Zena-san has fallen into a predicament from my nonchalant question.
I have to change the topic before--

"Unfortunately, the one who made that were the aunty in charge of the soldier's barrack, and me."

"Wai, Lilio! Didn't I tell you to keep it a secret! Moreover, I also did arrange the placement!"

Lilio revealed the truth faster than my follow-up words.
I'll ask Zena-san to show me the result of her hard work later.

"That's right, arranging food to make it look good is quite hard."
"Y, yes... that's right isn't it... it is important."

Zena-san averts her gaze, and mutters in low voice.
Oops, I should have ignored this one instead of following it up.
What a blunder. I would have heard the sound of decreasing favorable rating if this were a galge.

"Sir Pendragon, On this occasion I would like to thank you for associating with magic soldier Zena--"

A female civil official who's together with Zena-san and Lilio expresses her thanks with some long lines.
She's probably thanking me for instating Zena-san as a temporary staff of the training school as Zena-san's asked.

She's a civil official who works under Earl Seryuu and has followed Zena-san and the others--the Selected Labyrinth Corps here.
It seems her works involve studying the know-how of Selbira explorers, and then applying that knowledge for Seryuu City Labyrinth management.

I've arranged four people that comprise of two magic soldiers including Zena-san, and two scouts including Lilio, to participate in the training school as I'm the owner.
Zena-san and the others are grateful for it, but fighting together with high level magicians and scouts with a lot of experience should be good for not only the teachers, but also the students. You can say that it's a WIN-WIN business.

As for the corps' knights and soldiers who are waiting for their equipments to be repaired, the Marchioness has approved them to mix with the guards and keep the explorers company to protect the city's public order.

--With this, Zena-san shouldn't be in danger during the time I'm away from the labyrinth city.

I feel slightly a bit overprotective, but it's normal to worry about a friend right.

"....Does Satou like Zena?"
"This is quite sudden, Karina-sama."

I was drained of my strength when I turned around to see Lady Karina behind me.

....I want to ask why is she wearing armor instead of the dress.

"What does that outfit mean? Didn't you ask me to prepare your dress since you said that

you're going to be in the presence of the duke today?"

I edge up to Lady Karina with a smiling face.
I've prepared her a dress with offensive power that'll help her get a marriage proposal since she's going to meet an influential noble and all.

"....Because, the glances from the people around are scary when I wear a dress."
"It's not okay even if you say it cutely."
"Satou is mean desuwa! Even though you're so kind toward Zena..."

That's because Zena-san is a friend and she's helped me a lot.
Leaving the pouting Lady Karina for a bit, I wonder why are Zena-san and Arisa staring hard at me?
I understand the situation after seeing the grinning Lilio.

--It's due to Lady Karina's remarks earlier huh.

"She's--"
"It's a match desuwa!"

When I was going to say, "She's an important friend I respect", Lady Karina who seemed slightly flustered shouted out loud like she was covering my words.
I was only going to answer the question that she asked herself.

"Have a match with me! I will wear that embarrassing dress if you win against me."

H-hey, please don't say such misleading things.
The dress that I've prepared is the latest popular one in the Royal Capital fashion. The chest area is somewhat spacious, but the exposure level is not that high.

All the dresses that Lady Karina had worn up to now, including the one I had made in Gururian city, were of old conservative designs. She must be thinking like this due to that.

Well, since she's going to wear it if I win the match, let's end this quick.

"It cannot be helped, are you alright using the same rule as when you fight Pochi and Tama?"
"Of course, just as I've hoped desuwa!"

When Pochi and Tama are fighting with Lady Karina, the match is decided if either is pushed out of the battle ground, or their back touches the ground.

"And if I win--"

Come to think of it, I haven't heard Lady Karina's demand if she wins.
Lady Karina stares at me with reddened face.

Or rather, it feels like she's glaring at me.

While looking like she's in her wits' end, Lady Karina makes a shocking demand.

"--W, with me, ma--marry me desuwa!"

Ha? Marry?

Arisa who's repeatedly saying guilty around me is noisy.
I'm glad Mia is tagging along with Pochi and Tama eating around.
By the way, Lulu is with Nana and Liza loading our luggage from the container to the airship.

The peanut gallery are cheering and booing for Lady Karina.

"W-wrong."

Lady Karina is so confused her eyes are spinning, but no one listens to her excuse.

She was probably intending to say "Pretend to be my fiance" in order to stop people from proposing her in the Royal Capital, but she ended up saying, "Marry", since she was too flustered.

I think there's no mistake that this girl feels favorable of me, but I cannot help being puzzled as to whether she holds the feeling of love toward me as an opposite sex.
She might even think of me like a brother or a buddy.

I'm worried with Zena-san who's looping the word "Marry" like a broken record.

"Young master! We've prepared the stage!"

The peanut gallery have finished preparing the stage before I can say the follow-up.
We're going to the temporary borrowed arena space where Liza usually fights on.

◇

I'm standing at the opposite of Lady Karina.

She's wearing the equipments I've prepared and Raka today. She's not carrying her weapon.
The usual bare hands.
I also match her and give the Fairy Sword that I usually wear on my waist to Arisa.

Even though I had made Lady Karina's equipment so that it wouldn't hinder the shaking while maintaining the defensive power, Arisa modified it with magic to make it unshakable.

"W-wait, you're not thinking of losing on purpose right?"
"I don't."
"Don't get tempted by the breasts okay? I'll let you touch mine as much as you want later."
"No, I don't need that."

Arisa said some stupid things in low voice, so I denied her immediately.
To begin with, what does touching a little girl's breasts gain me.

"Then I'll ask Lulu to let you touch her breasts later!"

I'm slightly attracted with the permission to touch Lulu's breasts that are growing nicely, but making an empty promise without the approval from the person herself like this is no good.

"Calm down Arisa. I will not lose."
"R, really? That is so isn't it. I mean, you have us after all."

I stroke the anxious Arisa's head, and then I step forward to the center of the temporary arena where Lady Karina is waiting.

I'd like to win the fight in an instant, but I cannot do that.

Lady Karina would be embarrassed if I win effortlessly, yet the people around would think that I want to marry her if they deem me cutting corners.
Let's go with fighting an equal match for a while, and then win narrowly in the end.

It sounds quite troublesome.

Part 23 - To the Royal Capital (3)

Satou's here. There are things you can't fight against even though you know. During overtimes late at night, I had eaten snacks with high calories even though I knew they were no good.

◇

"You'll lose instantly if you think I'm still what I used to be and let your guard down you know?"
"That is scary. Please don't be too hard on me."
"Fuhn, desuwa. I wonder how long can you keep looking calm?"

Raka is quiet today.
Looks like it's busy invoking physical reinforcement, spirit enhancement, and acceleration force artes in secret.

I set up my stance after making sure that Raka has finished casting the reinforcement magic.

--There's no start signal in a match between explorers.

Lady Karina who's approaching like she's crawling on the ground falls down in front of me--no, it only looks like she's fallen down.
She's begun spinning to do an ax kick before my eyes.

In most stories, this should be the time where I cross my arms to block the kick, but there's no point doing such consideration.
I shift half of my body, avoiding her heel.

--The heel that should've been evaded suddenly changes its direction diagonally mid-air.

Raka probably made a foothold in the air which allowed her to alter the kicking direction.
Even disregarding that, I think Lady Karina who could do such thing in that instant is amazing herself.
Tama is good at this kind of maneuver, so Lady Karina might've been taught by her.

I hit Lady Karina's foot in short range with palm strike.
While my palm is destroying many small shields that Raka's created, I parry another of Lady Karina's strike.

The peanut gallery cheer.

"Oh! He evaded that blow!"
"Rather, is that beauty-san's armor a magic item."
"Isn't that the same equipment as the ones『Pendragon』people have?"
"As expected of equipment belonging to the ones they call『Woundless』!"

I can't spare any time to listen to their commentaries.

While using the foot that's touching the ground as the axis, Lady Karina unleashes a roundhouse kick with her other leg.
I evade that with a back step while being careful not to get out of the arena.

It seems she's judged that using only big moves won't hit me, she's changed her tactic to using combinations of small moves.

Lady Karina is attacking with shrewdness that's clearly different than the time when she was in Muno city, such as the flurry of jabs to distract me on the upper part while trying to trip my leg.
Looks like the result of the accumulated training she's done with the beastkin girls ever since she arrived in the labyrinth city is surfacing.

The ebb and flow of Lady Karina's and my's offenses and defenses continue.
Unfolding left and right as if we're dancing.

I handle Lady Karina mid-air triple kicks with my hand and counterattack her with a roundhouse kick.
Of course I've held back on the kick quite a bit but no one will doubt it since the speed is not inferior to Lady Karina's.

Lady Karina uses the force field created with Raka's power as a foothold and changes her orbit mid-air, avoiding my kick.
Her movement is already expert enough.

"Oy, how the heck did she evade that kick!"
"Shut it, concentrate on the goddess's fight!"
"Ah, too bad! Karina-sama! Fight!"
"Aah, mou. Stop fighting dangerously and finish it already!"
"Mwu."

Lady Karina finally reveals her trump card while the spectators are giving their arbitrary explanation and encouragement in the background.

"Oy! That!"
"Is that Magic Edge?"
"But, it's blue?"

In accordance to my crisis perception, I jump back to evade Lady Karina who's slashing down a blade made of blue light from the air.
It's a 30 cm long blade of light embodied from the light released by Raka's main body.

It was an unexpected attack, it probably would have scared me if the light was a bit longer.
However, it won't hit me with this distance.

"Got youuu!"

Ah, Lady Karina, you shouldn't speak out that line.

The two layered trump card that was planned to take me by surprise was ruined by Lady Karina who shouted that out loud, believing she had won.

I twist my upper body to evade the light blade shot from Raka's main body.
The attack flies diagonally downward, so there's no one beyond the line of fire.

I was on guard when the light blade was passing through beside me, worrying whether it would explode, but it proved to be a needless worry.
The light blade pierces the ground, and disperses just like that.

"Not yett!"

Nevertheless Lady Karina hasn't given up, and continues to attack fiercely, but fatigue and impatience are floating on her face.
It seems she had put the stake on the attack just now, the blue light that's emitting from Raka's main body has clearly weakened too. Lady Karina is also running out of magic power.

Good grief, fighting Lady Karina whose breasts aren't swaying isn't fun, so let's put this to an end about now.
The peanut gallery are probably satisfied now anyway, and Lady Karina who has shown her trump card should have no regret too.

I have to think of a way to make it looks like I narrowly win after fiercely attacking her who can't evade.

--Arisa probably would scold me, "Don't let your guard down."

I strike with my left palm to break Lady Karina's posture.
My left palm destroy the weakened Raka's protection, and then pushes Lady Karina's shoulder--or how it should have been, Lady Karina who's become tired loses her strength and falls, accidentally avoiding my palm strike.
My nail slightly grazes her armor, but it's weak enough to not even scratches it.

I correct my missing attacks, and continue to corner Lady Karina.
I make her move to the verge of the arena.

The spectators hold their breath while watching Lady Karina being cornered.
I flick her guarding arms with multiple strikes, Lady Karina's body bends backward.

--Three more moves. I plan to lead Lady Karina to counterattack my attack, and then counter that to defeat her.

The peanut gallery become heated in the next moment.

The demons are dancing.

"Oooooh!"
"--Oh God!"
"W-what are those!"
"M-miracles do exist..."

The demonic breasts gain their freedom from Arisa's binding (curse), snatching my view and thought.

I've seen similar scene in the underground labyrinth, but this one is with proper clothes.
And yet, the volume difference is too great.

The gap between the rich and the poor is too cruel.

I, whose eyes have been robbed, cannot react to Lady Karina's kick that's coming from the blind spot.
Rejecting the crisis perception and space grasp complain, I freely chase after the track.

"Noooooo!"
"Satouu!!"
"Gooooo! Karina-samaaaaa!"

I could hear the voices of Arisa and Mia, and also Lady Karina maid group among the spectators' cheers.

The fated strike settled it, and the end of the match is decided with the off-arena rule.

◇

"Haven't I said times and times again not to let your guard down."
"Mwu, you can't be careless okay. You can't okay? You can be flexible but carelessness is no good okay. Absolutely, okay?"

In the end, I got pressed by Arisa and Mia.
Or rather, Mia. When did you come back.

After apologizing to the two, "Sorry for making you worry", I call out Lady Karina who's sitting on the ground without moving.

"Are you alright, Karina-sama?"
『I hope you would not mind leaving her alone until she's sorted her feeling.』
"Is that so? Then I'll leave it to Raka and Erina to console her."

It goes without saying that I was the winner of the match.

Right before Lady Karina's kick hit my head, I moved my head away from her beautiful leg while my line of sight was still fixed to those.
And then, during the opportunity when the demonic breasts were hidden by her body, I slightly pushed her back, who was still in the air, to make her fly.

The fated strike might just be a light one, but I probably shouldn't say that Lady Karina is exaggerating.

The spectators probably saw her being overenthusiastic and went out of the arena.

"Karina~?"
"Does it hurt nodesu?"

Since Pochi and Tama have also come to cheer Karina up, I get up to leave the place.
I feel the sensation of my robe's sleeve being pulled, when I look down, there are the white fingers of Lady Karina, whose face is wet from bitter tears, gripping my robe.

"I'll show you that I'll win next time."
"Please don't be too hard on me at that time."

I have a favorable impression of her in this regard. I would have supported her as much as she likes if the target weren't me.
I give my consent to reply the tearful voice of Lady Karina, and then change with Pochi and Tama.

"Karina did well nodesu."
"Together, more, and more training~?"
"Of course desuwa!"

Leaving the three who are heating up, I confirm with Liza the departure preparation. Lulu and Nana have already boarded the airship, they're not on this place anymore.
The battle was long, so there shouldn't be much time until the departure now.

I have to make Lady Karina change into her dress in the airship, and then go around greeting the people who have come to see me off.

After thanking Baronet Dyukeli for the carriage, I exchange greetings with his daughter Merian, and the Noja Princess, Mitia.

"Satou-sama, the match earlier was amazing."
"It really was ja! A martial artist as skilled as Satou might even be nominated into the Shiga Eight Swords!"

I would immediately decline if such an offer came up.
Please excuse me from a place where people who are of the same type as the third prince gather.

Iruna and Jenna of the [Beautiful Wings] have also come as the representative of the training school.

"Please leave the Pendora apprentices to us."
"Right right, we won't let girlfriend-san and her friends get any injury, please don't worry."
"Are you talking about Zena-san? She's an important friend of mine, but she's not my lover

you know?"
"Eh? Is it like that?"
"Didn't I say so Jenna? Satou-sama's lover is the one with big breasts, Karina-sama."

I also deny that, and then greet the next guests.
The leader of mid-level explorers, Koshin-shi, and Miss Gina and Miss Heriona of the [Moonlight] have also come. I couldn't talk for long with them, but I'm happy to receive their blessing.

Lastly, I greet Zena-san and the others for the last time before we depart.

"I'll be back in half a month, so please don't be rash during that time."
"Yes, I will study in the training school and get closer to the strength of Satou-san and the others even a little!"
"Leave Zena-cchi to me, I won't stop her being rash, but I won't let her be reckless."

I return Lilio's subtly un-relieving words with a bitter smile, and tell Zena-san to not do rash things once again.

We go toward the ramp where the airship is waiting.
We wave our hands toward Zena-san and the others while climbing the ramp.

We seem to be the last guests as they immediately take the ramp away as soon as I've boarded, and I can hear the hum from the activation of the airship's main engine.

We go toward the observatory room while being reminded of the the busy schedule in the Royal Capital.

SS: Practice Scene

"Unn, dou, tro wa! Unn, dou--stop! Pochi! Your arms and legs are all over the places! The right leg from the heel, and the left leg from the toes! Tama too, be more focused on the fingertips! You two, when you land after jumping and see each other, don't forget to turn your body toward the audiences! Absolutely don't show your butt toward the audiences when you land okay."

I stop clapping my hands, and find faults on Pochi and Tama's dance.
It's quite watchable even right now, but we have to increase the quality if we want to show it on stage to the people after all.

"Fingers~?"
"Arisa, I can't understand if you talk too quick nodesu! Tell me a bit more slowly please nodesu."

Looks like my instructions were too packed, Pochi complained with teary eyes.
Tama keeps only playing with her fingers.

Not good, this could fail due to me getting fired up alone like what happened in my former life.
Calm down, Arisa.

I explain to Pochi and Tama slowly in an easy-to-understand manner.
However, it doesn't seem to be transmitted to the two well.

Aa, mou, teaching it with words is difficult.
Teaching skill seems to have little use, oh right! Let's use light magic.

I use the skill points, which I was unsure to use on during the level up, to raise light magic skill to level 1.
I feel that it's pointless to pick the same skill that I had before resetting, but from my experience in the labyrinth, even skill level 1 has many uses.
Is it just my imagination or is the needed skill points seems fewer. I don't know if it's because I had learned the skill before, or because my level has increased, but let's leave the check for later.
The stage training is more important right now.

"You two, look at this."
"Small Pochi~?"
"There's also tiny Tama too nodesu."
"Mwu, not there."
"I'll put Mia later okay."

Using light magic, I make the deformed Pochi and Tama illusions with 3:1 head-to-body ratio to dance.

"Look at this well, this one is the dance that Pochi and Tama did earlier, and this one is the one with the correct moves."

I arrange the two side-by-side to show the difference.

"I cancan~"
"Understood nodesu!"

Good.
It's worth using the skill points for--

"However, I don't know how to make it right nodesu."

--Or not....

Aa mou, just how should I do.

◇

The one who saved me who was at a loss was my beloved darling.
Oh! White robe! Isn't that white robe, Sensei!

Ua, ua~.
I take out glasses from Item Box and present it to him with both hands.

"Why the glasses?"
"Please, by all means, wear it."
"Arisa, you're talking funny you know?"

Ah, no, not on the pocket, please wear it on the ears!
But, discarding that style is also difficult.

I really really want a digital camera.

"Arisa, are you thinking some strange thing? You have a silly grin on your face you know."
"No way?!"

After being pointed so, I comb my cheeks in panic to return my expression.

"So, I only need to teach Pochi and Tama to dance like this image right?"
"Un, can you do it?"
"It's easy. If you do it like this, see."

Uwa, what feat of skill.
Who would've thought using [Magic Hand] magic to teach Pochi and Tama the dance steps by moving them like marionettes.... You normally can't think that.

"Mario-nette~"
"Pochi and Tama are at Master's mercy nanodesu!"

"Hey now, stop saying strange things and memorize the motions okay."
"Aye~"
"Yes, nanodesu!"

Still, even though he's skillful enough to make Pochi and Tama dance at the same time after just seeing it once, why can't he chant well, it's too strange.

I get fired up when I imagine him going into the labyrinth depth once in a~while to secretly practice.
Enough to make me want to push him down!

"Arisa. Drool."

I quickly wipe my lip after hearing his astonished words.
This young body is too honest with itself it's dangerous. Dangerous.

"What about the clothes? Do you want me to make new ones?"
"Right~, We can go with dresses, but Pochi and Tama are going to fly...."
"Ninja costume~?"
"That's a bit."
"Then the Pixie costume nodesu!"

Ah, the ones they wore when they were dancing in the air at the Elf Hometown huh.
It does seem like it'll go well.

"Alright, let's go with that! Master, please add gimmicks so that the wings emit light when they dance in the air!"
"Ah, that's going to be pretty. I'll see if I can use material that's not too particular for it."

The costumes should be fine with this.

"Now! Everyone! Let's do a rehearsal this time!"
"Nn."
"Aye~"
"Roger nanodesu!"

Pochi and Tama have begin to dance, matching to the music, as Mia starts her performance, and the singing which I've put my whole soul into echoes in the studio.

◇

And then, the real performance has begun.
On the stage in front of mass of people.
I had thought that it would be more deserted, but everyone seems to be unexpectedly free.

I scream the starting words toward the audiences.

"Listen to my songggg!"

Ah, wonderful.
WIth this I can write off another entry from the list of things I want to do.

Next, I want to push down my beloved darling.
No! I will surely push him down!

SS: Blue Mantle

"What'd you say! We're the『Pendora』ya know?! Quickly bring out the best liquor you have."
"Y-yes, at once!"

The guests nearby frown at the violent youngsters.
They seem to be under the Pendragon who have made their name in the Labyrinth City.

They've defeated a Floormaster and performed a parade the other day, so there's no one in the bar who doesn't know them.
However, according the rumor, Chevalier Pendragon should be a respectable person who has established an orphanage and fed the poor.
It might be because people like such gather when your organization becomes too big.

"Oy! The pretty nee-chan over there! Come here and pour us liquor."
"What is it? Are you intending me to pour you liquor?"

The drunk youngster stretches his hands toward the beauty's splendid pair of hills, but he's stopped by a scaly light shield that appears before the woman.

"Uo, oow.... The heck are you doing!"
『We are the ones who should be protesting. I cannot overlook your criminal act just now you know?』

A mysterious reverberating voice of a man comes from the woman.
Of course, it doesn't seem like there's a child who's hiding.

"Mou, please don't go ahead alone."
"Exactly! You're the Baron's daughter, so please use the carriage at least."

After hearing what the girls who seem to be her attendants are saying, the men who were clamoring just now flee from the back door.
This is a country with a long history of imperial rule, you will surely be charged guilty and dropped into a criminal slave if you're impolite toward nobles.

◇

"Yo, nee-chan, how 'bout playing with me? We're the『Pendora』y'know!"
"No, release me. Don't touch me!"

The fleeing men called out to a plain girl in one part of the slum away from the bar just now.
They forcefully catch and raise the girl's hands while pushing her to the wall, it doesn't look like they're picking her up at all.

There are few pedestrians on this road, but regardless, there aren't many people who are willing to against armed explorers.

They can only call the guards and and the vigilante corps at most.

However, it seems there's no shortage of brave people.

"You guys! Release her hands!"
"What? A little rabbit girl huh? We're the『Pendora』y'know! Scram if you don't want a world of hurt!"
"Pendora you said?"

The little rabbitkin girl who's wearing a neat one-piece dress stops moving after hearing the men said, [Pendora].
The men seem to think that she's daunted, they continue to speak abusively.

"That's right! We'll throw you to the monsters in the labyrinth if you're too noisy!"
"Don't even think of calling the guards okay? A Mithril Explorer-sama is behind us."
"Go away if you understand! Even if you're a woman, we don't have any business with your beastly smell."

The men who've got their conquest desire stimulated to see the trembling shoulders of the girl laugh and jeer vulgarly.

However, at the next moment, one of the men falls down with bubbles on his mouth.
The rabbitkin girl has disappeared before they knew it.

The man who pins the town girl releases her hands in panic and become wary of the surrounding.
The rabbitkin girl who's gotten close to the man's leg strikes the man's solar plexus with her sheathed short sword.
The man's eyes never caught the rabbitkin girl until right before he fainted.

"Huh? Rabibi, what are you doing?"
"Ah, Usasa! You've come at the right time. I've caught the rumored fake『Pendora』."
"Eh? These old men?"
"Yeah, I followed them since they look suspicious with the deep blue mantles."

Since the men were still explorers, they only ended up having to pay the penalty without getting turned into slaves, but there is no need to ask as to whether they can pay the penalty for impersonating other people.

Afterward, there is no one who impersonates the [Pendora] in the labyrinth city ever again.

SS: Loot

"So, have you decided which one will you pick?"
"I think the『Item Appraisal』one is nice after all, albeit classic. To think that all three of them have Orbs in them, that sure make you perplexed~"

Three treasure chests in varying sizes appeared after the floormaster had been defeated.
Arisa and me thought that the other two chests would disappear if we opened one of them, but then Tama quickly opened the three chests.
Tama was normally the one in charge of treasure chests when we found them in the labyrinth, she looked at the panicking Arisa while tilting her head.
In addition, the chests didn't have any trap set.

Leaving that aside, we continue sorting the spread loot in the Ivy Mansion's living room.

Even though they're going to the auction anyway, making the list of the items is important.
Furthermore, above all, checking out loot is fun.

There were three kinds of Orbs like in the middle layer inside the treasure chests, they were [Item Appraisal], [Water Magic], and [Paralyze Resistant].
I secretly hoped for one of them to be a [Chant] Orb, but it was in vain.

Every one of these three Orbs seems to be a hit, and the [Item Appraisal] one seems to be a rarity among the rarity.
We had some big debate like whether Nana the shield bearer or Mia the recovery girl to have the [Paralyze Resistant], or either Nana the shield bearer or Lulu the rear guard to have the [Water Magic], or if Arisa the well-informed should have the [Item Appraisal].

In the end, we decided to choose the [Item Appraisal] for Lulu so that she could judge whether the foodstuff she had in hands to be safe.
Good grief, it's really like our gluttonous girls to pick it by food-related matter.

"The others are all questionable equipment aren't they~"
"Arisa, the basis for that conclusion is strange, so I urge you to reconsider."

Nana objected to Arisa's arbitrary decision.
Certainly, none of them is especially good, but I think it's a line up that's usable to some extent.
For the magic weapons, there are an adamantite war hammer, a mithril short sword, a Face-Tree bow, a mantis machette, a Lighting Crystal wand, and a paralyzing thorn spear, and for the normal weapons, there are four of them, including a black steel axe, and a silver dagger.

"Our usual cheat equipment sure are better aren't they~ and even though we have prepared the battle plan carefully, to win against an opponent 9 levels higher without getting hurt sure isn't normal."
"Like injury~?"
"Pain is no good nanodesu! It's painful desuyo?"

"A pervert?"
"Noo~o!"

Arisa was nearly treated like a masochist, but I think being unhurt is a good thing.
If I level them up for another 70, I won't be worried even if some demon-lord class enemy comes. Though according to Arisa, the Dog-head and the Wild Boar King were special cases, so it might be enough with just another 50 levels.

There were few armors among the loot, maybe it was geared more toward weapons this time.
Besides the Thunder Arm Armor that's made from mithril, and the Vajra Shell great shield, most of them are normal armors that are simply sturdy.

As you can expect from the squid drop item, the Lightning Arm Armor has 10 tentacles on it that will automatically defend against anyone who attack the wearer. The tip of the tentacle can stun with electricity like a stun gun.
It's a full body armor so I thought that only certain people can wear it, but according to Seoru-shi the shadowkin, it seems magic armors that come from the labyrinth can automatically adjust their size to accommodate the wearer.
I feel that it's been awhile since I see a fantasy-like item like this. Rather, 'game-like' is probably more appropriate.
Unlike in games, the automatic adjustment is limited to 20% range at most, so someone who's as small as Leriril for example wouldn't be able to equip it.

The Vajra Shell great shield is sturdy despite its light weight, and it can deploy anti-magic membrane if you fill it with magic power, so it might be useful for a shield-bearer who challenges the labyrinth's middle layer.
I've over-fished the Vajra Shellfish when I was leveling Mia back then, so I have a lot of them sleeping in my storage, maybe I should try creating one.
There are also a Scale Dinosaur scale armor, and an Armored Frog leather armor.

"Satou."
"Look at Pochi too please nodesu!"
"Tama too~?"

When I turn my head around, the three youth troupe have put rings, crowns, earrings, and necklaces to the point like it's, "Is that it!", while posing.
The three who who wore a smile on their whole face looked cute, and when I said some lip service, "You're all like princesses", they reacted shyly while fidgeting like Arisa, which was rare.

As for the jewelry and accessories, they're made from normal metal and the craftsmanship aren't too exquisite, but since the jewels are big, they probably can be sold for good money.
There are amulet type accessories too among them, but their effects are all questionable like +1% resistance against a particular element for example. I wonder if it'll be different if you equip multiple of them?

"Is this mantle made of the Mad Fang Tiger's fur? Magic isn't effective against that tiger, so I wonder if this mantle has the same effect?"

The mantle that Liza is holding is made from the fur of Mad Fang Tiger just as she's said. It has good performance against slash attacks, but it doesn't seem to have any magic resistance-up effect.

There are also several mantles of different kind, like a robe made from the Blood-colored Spider thread with the fur on its sleeve and collar.

Still, I wonder if the one who provided these loot was the Dungeon Master?

I tried asking Arisa and Seoru-shi, but the two didn't know.
I should ask the person themselves if I meet them later.

◇

The crowd that have been gathered in the venue is heating up whenever Arisa introduces the loot.

"Ta-da! This is the centerpiece this time! The『Thunder Arm Armor』! It's made from mithril which is common, but these tentacles are amazing!"
"""Ooooh!"""

No, you guys, can you stop making a stir before the [Amazing] part is explained?

"Now listen! They will automatically move and defend the wearer from their attacker!"
""Oooh!""

Huh? The voices had decreased, wonder if it didn't meet their expectation.

It's quite convenient, but since it seems to reduce your maximum MP by 100, it's likely an equipment that a magician finds hard to use.

In the end, the adamantite war hammer, and the Vajra Shell great shield were more popular than Arisa's declared centerpiece.

Later, when I came to the armor shop in the labyrinth city to sell the Vajra Shell great shield as Kuro, they didn't buy it, but it was to be auctioned instead.

After several days of advertising, the auction for the shield opened in front of the Explorer guild, and some Red Iron explorer bought it for some good money.
I still have around a hundred Vajra Shells, but I'll restrain myself as it'll collapse the price otherwise.

In addition, I blew the money from the Vajra Shell great shield sales to have a party with the captain-san and every member of the tenement house craftsmen.
There were some unfamiliar explorers who also participated for some reason, but I let it

slide since it was fun.

Intermission: Top Meat Skewers and Pendragon

"Uncle, give us five top meat skewers."
"Awright, you're quite the the boss ordering the top meat. Did you guys just hunt some big game?"
"Yeah, we got the Twin Head Lizard we were aiming!"
"That's quite something."

While admiring it, the shopkeeper begins to grill the top meat the boy has ordered.
The top meat skewers don't constantly get sold unlike the regular skewer, so he doesn't have any that's already grilled.

The shopkeeper is talking to a rabbitkin boy who's just come to age, though you won't know that he's an explorer from his appearance. His friends are boys and girls who are about the same age as him.
They're probably people overflowing with talent since they were able to defeat the Twin Head Lizard residing deep in the labyrinth. They might even become Red Iron explorers in the future.

"Haha, we're still inexperienced."
"The genuine Red Iron are all monsters y'know?"
"I'll tell Pochi-san and Tama-san."
"Ah, no, don't you dare Rabibi! I'd be killed by the other『Pendora』guys if you make those two cry."

The shopkeeper recalled the rumor about them when he heard their conversation.

Appearing like a comet in the labyrinth city, the people connected to [Pendragon] rose to among the top of the explorers in a blink of an eye.
They're the graduates of the training school that has been established by the charitable leader of the [Pendragon].
Those graduates are said to wear matching mantles drawn with a dragon holding a pen.

"So you guys are the rumored [Pendora] huh?"
"Ehe, that's right."

The rabbitkin boy looks embarrassed while scrubbing his nose.
His ears stand up proudly.

"Are those Pendragon guys as amazing as they say?"
"They're not just amazing!"

The shopkeeper who like to gossip give the [Pendora] kids some regular skewers to tide them over until the top meat skewers are done grilling.
These regular skewers are the compensation for the gossip. If he stock his gossip repertoire here, he could recover the cost from the drunken people who would treat him some drink in the bar.

"Pochi-san's strike can break through the plastron of a Soldier Mantis easily y'know?"
"Tama-san too, she exterminated Assassin Goblins like they were insects going astray to flame."
"Mia-sama's magic is also amazing. Her healing magic heals without leaving a scar."

The boys and girls don't stop boasting the [Pendragon] even after the smell of the grilling fat from the top meat has begin to spread.

"I think it's also thanks to Nana-san's defensive power you know? She's never got any injury even after being attacked that much. As as shield bearer myself, the difference is too great I don't even know where to start to become like her."
"It's the same as me who's in charge of attacking. Liza-san taught me spearmanship but I can't imagine ever catching up to her level."
"Yeah, that person is extraordinary...."

Even though he assumed the role of a listener pleasantly, the shopkeeper couldn't help becoming interested and asked them a question.

"How extraordinary do you mean?"
"You know Magic Edge?"
"It's a secret art used by people like the Shiga Eight Swords right? I was an explorer when I was young myself. I had trained for three years when I got myself an Ant Wing Silver Sword, but I didn't feel like I could do it at all."
"Hee, uncle was an explorer too huh."
"I stopped at Bronze plate though."

There are a lot of people who have given up and changed their profession from the dangerous job of explorers like the shopkeeper here.
It's hard to measure strength of explorers from their appearance alone, there are some shopkeepers in this labyrinth city who are as strong as a knight here and there.

Thus, there's rarely any vagrant who dares to steal from the food stalls.
Because the risk is too great.

"So, what about the Magic Edge?"
"Liza-san can use it."
"Magic Edge? So there's someone other than the Four Red Devas who can use it in this labyrinth city."

There are only four known users of Magic Edge in this labyrinth city.
[Crimson Young Noble], [Red Fang Lion] [Blood Sword Wolf], [Scarlet Flame Witch], the four people who have 'red' part in their second name are praisingly known as the [Four Red Devas] in the labyrinth city.

Black Spear Liza is famous as the fifth person who stands equal to them, but there are three more people in Pendragon that can use it, and all those girls can use the higher [Magic Edge Cannon], but that fact is not known.

The shopkeeper skilfully flips the top meat skewers that have changed color.
The boys and girls who should have their stomachs calmed down from the regular skewers can't wait any longer after smelling that aroma.

"Oh right, what kind of person is the『Young Master』?"
"Gentle!"
"He brought a lot of delicious cakes when he visited the training school!"
"He's popular among the girls."
"But he doesn't seem too happy even though he's popular."
"That's because Chevalier-sama likes big breasts..."

Their words match the rumor in the city.
People generally evaluate him as a [good natured debauchery noble], and [Young Master]. It's not a mockery, the rumor about him has slight amazement and praise mixed in.

"Isn't it done already?"
"Amateurs should shut up, let me show you my skill here."

The shopkeeper stares at the grills, and listens carefully to the grilling sounds.
This is the secret of [Grilling delicious skewers] that was taught by the [Young Master]'s maid he's acquainted with in the marketplace.
Teaching a secret method to someone she's just met, the shopkeeper thinks that it's really like someone who serves under the good-natured [Young Master].

The shopkeeper who's seized the best timing quickly pulls up the skewers from the wire mesh, and give them to the boys and girls who have been waiting for it.

"Eei, been waiting for this!"
"Looks really good."
"Kuh, I've waited for this!"

The boys and girls who're drooling on their mouth bite at the piping hot skewers.

Their fangs break through the fragrant grilled skewers.
Their tongues fully enjoy the meat juice that are loaded with flavor coming out between their fangs and the meat.

To the completely delicious flavor transmitting on their tongues, they nod at each other in silence.

"Delishhh"
"As you can expect from a single big copper coin worth of skewer."

The boys and girls praise it when they pause after one bite.
They lick the oil that's dropped on their hands from the skewers. Needless to say, they can't let this delicious taste goes to waste.

"Aah, it's too delicious."

"I wonder if we can eat this everyday when we become Red Iron explorers?"
"We surely will! I mean Pochi-san and Tama-san tell me that Chevalier-sama's home cooking is even more delicious."
"I can't imagine something more delicious than this."

The girls who have finally finished swallowing the meat in their mouths participate in praising the meat skewers.
Eating the meat skewers after it got cold would have been a waste though, so they didn't continue the praise for long and started to nibble at it again.

"Ara? It's Usasa and the others. You're eating something that look really delicious."
"Yo, Arisa. This is extremely tasty ya know!"
"Arisa-chan, hello. The skewers here are delicious."
"The stall whom Lulu recommends isn't it. There's still time before the dinner anyway, I'll be asking for one too please."
"Coming! It's one big copper coin though, alright with you?"
"I can afford that much."

In case of children who wear good clothing, they might be some noble children who's come wandering without their attendant, yearning to be an explorer. It often happens that they can't pay the money themselves, so it's important to ask ahead.

The shopkeeper never noticed that this little girl who was talking with the boys and girls was the last of the [Pendragon] they've been gossiping until just now.

SS: Pochi's Pupils

"Pochi nee-san, please take this."

Usasa and the [Pendora] boys are presenting some very tasty-looking frog meat skewers on the plate nodesu.

When Pochi looks at everyone's serious face, Pochi can see through what they want nanodesu.
Pochi puts her hand in front of Usasa who's trying to say something to silently stop him, and then nods nodesu.

"Pochi understands even without anyone saying it nodesu. It'll take some time so wait here nodesu!"
"Yes!"
"Aexpected of Nee-san!"
"Straight to the point!"
"I'll keep waiting here even if sandstorm comes gau!"

--Gau?
Well it's alright nodesu. Pochi will just have to tell Gau-kun the merit and demerit of over-characterization later!

Pochi went to the second floor of the [Su-tro-m] to take the exceptional items and came back nodesu.
Pochi takes it out of the magic bag wrapped in oil paper, and after slightly enjoying the aroma coming from the tiny gap, Pochi runs back to where everyone is waiting.

"Pochi will give everyone a slice each nodesu! It feels nice to chew desuyo?"

Pochi treats everyone with the special [Smoked Basilisk].

"U, um, Nee-san?"

Huhuh? It's strange nodesu.
Usasa doesn't look too well nodesu.

"You don't like smoked foods nanodesu?"
"N, no, I love it very much."

You should eat it if you love it then nanodesu.

"Usasa, a~n nanodesu."

Pochi puts a slice of the smoked basilisk into Usasa's mouth.
He muttered, "It's delicious", while his ears were turning red, and then began to chew it.

Yes, that's good nodesu.
After feeling satisfied, Pochi joins the group while biting the frog meat skewer the reward nodesu.

◇

"--Magic Edge nanodesu?"
"Yes! We want to learn it too! Please!"

Pochi had misunderstood nodesu.
Pochi will teach them properly since Pochi's eaten the frog skewers too.

"You put magic power into the magic sword like, 'ZUGYAN', and then--"
"Nee-san, we don't have magic swords."

Oah?
Master might give a lot if Pochi asks.

Pochi asks Master who's taking a nap under the tree shadow in the courtyard.

"You can't."
"Pochi can't nanodesu?"
"Un, no."

Unfortunately nanodesu.
Master is mean nanodesu.

"Master said we can't nodesu."

Usasa and the others unanimously lamented and fell on the ground nodesu.
Ah, I'm in trouble nodesu.

Liza has just returned right after snacking, so Pochi goes to her to consult this nodesu.

"What's wrong Pochi."
"Liza! Pochi wants magic swords nodesu!"
"Don't you have one?"
"Pochi does have one, but it's different nodesu."

After Pochi explained it to Liza, she gave me a [Naisu Aidea].

"We have to put magic power into this wooden sword?"
"That's right nanodesu. Pochi also practiced with a wooden sword at first nodesu. Pochi had forgotten nodesu!"

Pochi really misses it.
Pochi wants to stick together with Master every day like in those days nodesu.

"Nee-san, I can't do it!"

"This is a secret technique nanodesu! You can't do it just by practicing a bit nodesu!"

Even Pochi took a month to do it nodesu.
Only geniuses like Master and Tama can do it immediately nanodesu!

"Train for it steadily nodesu! Put your magic power like, 'ZUGYAN', and then strike like, 'ZUDON', nodesu!"

Receiving Pochi's encouragement, Usasa and the others shout with their spirit put into it, and begin the practice nodesu.
Pochi took a nap on top of Master's stomach while watching over them nodesu.
It's Tama's ninja day today, so Pochi has the monopoly nodesu.

It'll be nice if Pochi is together with Master like this too tomorrow nodesu.

Intermission: The Tale of Sir Pendragon

My ears caught the talk about him from the grumbles of some eternally Bronze explorers in the bar.
That young noble man became a Red Iron explorer after his first labyrinth exploration, it was of doubtful credibility but they told me that they heard it from guild staff when I treated them to some drink.
I decided to meet the guild staff member who told them the story in order to collect the increasingly more credible gossip.

Sorry for the late introduction, I'm someone who survives by reciting the tales of explorers and heroes in the labyrinth city, Barido the minstrel.
Whether this becomes a new heroic tale or a comedic show depends on his deeds. Now then, wonder how will this turn out....

◇Testimony from a certain guild staff member◇

"Yeah I know them, the『Pendragon』bunch right?"

An acquaintance guild staff member that I met in the staff bar easily told me the name of their party.
When I inquired him more, he asserted that the rumor saying that [Pendragon] acquired the Red Iron plates after exploring the labyrinth once was true.

Looks like the liquor makes the other staff members' lips loose, several of them start talking about it to me.

"The leader is a young nobleman."
"Yeah, he seemed to be rich; some beautiful women, girls and little girls were serving him."
"The main force seemed to be demi-human battle slaves, some beastkins and a scalekin."
"There was an unattractive maid too right?"
"They said the beautiful girl and little girl were magicians."

Having two magicians in a party is quite extravagant. In exchange they don't seem to have a priest, so it's probably a party that makes use of the demi-humans to be the disposable damage sponge.
The story about how they brought 100 Magic Cores back after their first labyrinth exploration supports that guess.

By the staff members' request, I play the lute to sing the [Great Exploit of Dozon-sama], and the [Crimson Young Noble's Hydra Extermination].

Still, [Pendragon] huh... to use the name of a fictional hero like this, they have some good taste.

◇First-hand account of certain beautiful explorers◇

"Yes I know him, he saved us in the labyrinth after all."
"Is he strong you ask? He was amazing, he sliced that hard Maze Ant right in two with a single swing of his sword."
"It was an expensive looking sword wasn't it."
"Yeah, it was a pretty sword."

Even if I only take half of their story about how Pendragon saved them when they were being chased by dozens of Maze Ants, it's quite enough to be a heroic tale.

The aforementioned sword the girls talked about seems to be an excellent mithril sword made by the dwarven master craftsman, Elder Dohar.
I see, it's no wonder he could slice the Maze Ants in half with such an excellent sword.

◇Testimony of certain baggage carriers◇

"Chevalier-sama? He gave me work! Cleaning and weeding!"
"He let me ate a lot of delicious meal!"
"I also ate! It was amazing!"

It seems he employed the baggage caarries who didn't get any work to clean and weed his newly bought mansion.
They spoke truly happily about how he treated the starving them until they were full.

They also told me about how he treated the children who were looking for works in front of the gate with good food.

It'd be nice if he's a charitable person like Dozon-shi, but.... I'm slightly worried since there's a rumor about him having little children who are not of age as his mistresses.

◇Testimony of certain maids◇

"Ehehe, it's nice isn't it? These are work clothes you know?"
"Un, Chevalier-sama gave it to us. It was a reward when we became full-fledged maids."

The young maids' smiles are dazzling.
However, looking at the sewing and the fabric, they must be quite expensive. Usually,, maids have to bring their own clothes each. It's very rare for the master to buy them the clothes like in this mansion.
I've heard that he's rich, but I'm interested just where does he gets his fortune from.

"Eh? Who introduced us?"
"There wasn't anything like introduction."
"We had been saved when we were dying in the mansion's stable."

What! Even if they're just honorary, nobles normally only employ people from fitting houses as live-in employees.
To hire uneducated baggage carriers, and even some dying children after healing them as his employees....

Many people who had heard this story gossiped that he had some ulterior motives to save the girls, but my intuition as a minstrel tells me that's not it.
The proof is these girls' smiles. There isn't anyone who will smile that brightly if they're abused.

◇First-hand account of certain middle-class explorers◇

"I think『Pendragon』will obtain the Mithril Plate sooner or later."

The ones speaking are the middle-class explorer who had gone to the labyrinth deep in an expedition, and his friends.

"It was amazing you know, we were in a desperate situation, being surrounded by the Maze Cockroaches all around us. Right at that time, his retainers appeared and killed the Maze Cockroaches one after another."
"That was really amazing huh. I say those girls must have used magic swords since they easily cut through the slippery crust of the Maze Cockroaches."

Fumu, not only the Chevalier-dono himself, his servants even have magic swords huh.
It's probably possible with his vast wealth, though...

"However, the real thing was after that."
"I thought I had died when a huge『Hunter Mantis』reared its ugly face from the Gushing Hole."

--What!

There are a lot of mantis monsters in the labyrinth, but if we're talking about [Hunter Mantis], it's a monster that only Red Iron explorers can handle.
Moreover, those explorers will surely escape if they encounter it unexpectedly.
Because it's an opponent that you challenge only after you're certain with the victory by investigating the terrain thoroughly and preparing various elaborate tools and traps beforehand.

"I understand your surprise. Far from stepping back, those little girls overwhelmed the『Hunter Mantis』from the beginning to end."
"I thought that was the last I gonna saw『Pendragon』bunch who chased after the『Hunter Mantis』that plunged into the Gushing Hole."

Entering a Gushing Hole willingly, unbelievable.
Since there's some rumor saying that Gushing Holes are places connected to the Underworld where the Demon God governs. There isn't actually anyone who's gone to the Underworld, but it's the 'Truth' that's been spoken since a long time ago.

Yet, according to their story, the [Pendragon]'s boys and girls returned safely.
I want to ask those girls just what kind of good luck were they blessed with, but during the creation of a heroic tale, it'd become rubbish if I don't save talking with the people themselves for the last.

--I have to be patience.

Unfortunately, the aforementioned Chevalier-dono didn't participate in the fight.
It's said that he and the maid who's accompanying him rarely ever enter the labyrinth, instead, only the girls beside them usually challenge the labyrinth.

I wonder what's he doing when he's not entering the labyrinth?

◇In a mansion of a certain noble◇

"What do think, it's wonderful right? I was given this when I went to the Marchioness's tea party."

The Baroness shows a ring with a small agate yet splendid design on her finger.
The minute craftsmanship enhances the beauty.
I don't know if this was the work of a master craftsman, but with such an achievement, it must be expensive.

"His maid is very good at cooking you know?"
"You can't eat other cakes anymore once you eat the castella."
"That soft gentle sweetness, it's truly a miracle."

I'm interested with this castella that has such high praises from these picky wives, but
it seems I know very well the person who makes the thing that the wives covet.
Nevertheless, there sure are many talented people working under him.
He must've hired varying kind of people with his enormous wealth.

I was also able to hear the story from the Marchioness with Baroness's reference.

I seemed to be viewed as a suspicious person who was sniffing around her favorite Chevalier, so I was warned that I would be treated as an enemy if I had a malicious intent beforehand.
I don't know what kind of hands did he use to win her favor, but he seems to not only have the brute force, but also excels at politics to be able to make the one who's controlling the noble society in the labyrinth city become his supporter like this.

He should have sought marriage with the Marchioness's third or fourth daughter if he wished for rank, but it doesn't seem to be the case.
I can't simply swallow the story of a sly old fox like her though....

I was able to hear some stories from the employees when I was leaving the Marquis's mansion.
As one would expect from employees of the influential Marquis house, they're wearing coral accessories that are quite rare in labyrinth city.

"Do you mean this? We got it from the Madam."

She quietly whispered to my ear that they were given by the Marchioness, but they were

originally presents from Chevalier Pendragon-sama for the Marchioness.

Also, whenever he comes for a tea party, it seems he never forgets to bring baked and honey cakes for the employees.
Someone usually does so in order--to hear bad rumor of their master--with it as the compensations, but it seems he only asked, "Please get along well with our maid."
His maid also only inquired impressions of the cakes from them, she never asked any rumor about the marquis family.

I wonder what is he aiming with his deeply laid plan...

◇In a mansion of a certain noble◇

"Fuhn, that black-haired brat will rouse rebellion to usurp this labyrinth city someday."

After ending up in the salon while looking for someone who didn't have good will toward Chevalier Pendragon, I heard such story from a noble who's at the prime of his life.

"He gathers the poor with money, gives them weapons, and then throws them into the labyrinth. He makes the survivors his soldiers, he must be gathering power to revolt against the kingdom!"

His words have no proof and substance but I feel some strange persuasive power in it.

The [poor who are thrown into the labyrinth] are probably the rumored organization of the Chevalier, [Pendora].
I'll try going to the training school he's established to get in touch with those [Pendora].

◇Pendora◇

I peek at the training school from the shadow, and just as the noble earlier has feared, they're practicing in a systematic order like an army would.

"Don't forget your role! The three spear users stab from the sides of the two shield-bearers! The scout doesn't need to participate in the battle. Devote yourself in checking the surrounding so that the other five can safely concentrate on the enemies!"

The instructors who are acting as the monsters are giving directions to the six trainee.
There are three groups of people who are doing the same kind of training in the courtyard. It seems there are also some instructors who aren't participating in the training, maybe they're for surprise attacks.

"Suspicious guy~?"

My heart had almost stopped from the sudden voice and cold sensation on my neck.

A catkin girl who's wearing some curious pink clothes that's appeared out of nowhere is holding a short sword against my neck.

I'm weak in battles, but good at sensing presences.
Yet I didn't notice her at all....

"Stop, he's just a minstrel."

I thought that my heart would really leap out of my mouth this time.
Before I knew it, a hand that's appeared from behind me pinches the short sword with its slender fingers.

When I timidly turned my head, there was the figure of the smiling Chevalier Pendragon.
He apologized for the catkin girl's impoliteness and told me to ask for permission from the office if I wanted to observe the training.

Still, just when did he appear?

--Perhaps, from the beginning?

I turned toward the direction he was walking, but no one was there.
Yet, his bottomless smile remained in my mind forever.

I wonder if the day when I sing his story will come.
As if scolding my timid heart, I pat the lute I hold in my chest.

Right now I understand the feeling of a knight who's facing off a dragon.

I am Barido, a reckless minstrel of the labyrinth city. Someday, I will surely spin a tale that'll be handed down to the future generations.

The name of that tale is--

SS: The Person Aze's Waiting for

"Uu, even though he asked if I wanted to go together with him...."

Aze-sama grumbles with tearful voice while lightly hitting a big chick-shaped cushion.

"Are you still shocked about the matter yesterday?"
"I mean!"
"That was Mia's scheme at work wasn't it.
Satou-san didn't seem to be aware of our『Kiss of Vow』custom you know."
"I-cannot-hear-you--"

Aze-sama blocks her ears like a child would.
She's happy that Satou wasn't aware of the custom, yet on the other hand, it also means that the kiss Satou-san gave her on the forehead when they first met wasn't intended to be the『Kiss of Vow』.

That said, there is no way I can tell her, "You should've gone together with Satou-san then."
Because she's the last High Elf that remains in Boruenan Forest.
Aze-sama is the emotional support of the elves that live in the village, she is yearned by the elves, and an object of faith of other fairykins and demi-humans, revered like a living god.

"Uu...stupid Satou...."

There's no doubt their faith would vanish if they saw her figure now.

Or maybe, should we send an assassin aiming for Satou-san?
There's probably no one that can win against someone who defeated the Evil Jelly colony that contaminated the World Tree with a single strike though.

Since Aze-sama who's become tired from grumbling is finally asleep while holding the cushion, I quietly resume cleaning the tree house.

◇

"Aze, cheer up?"
"That's right Aze! Won't you give me honey cakes?"

The pixies are trying to console Aze-sama who's looking melancholic on the balcony of the tree house.
However, Aze-sama only reacts lightly.

Only two days have passed since Satou-san left, so this can't be helped....

An unexpected visitor came right at that time.

"Lua-san, it's been awhile. These are some souvenirs for you."

"Eh? Satou-san?"

Satou-san who's returned with teleport magic hands me the magic bag which was given to him as a parting gift.
When I look inside, there's a big lump of meat. It's probably from some beast. Nea probably knows how to turn this into a delicious dish.

Even without me saying anything, Satou-san briskly walks to the balcony where Aze-sama is sulking.

"I'm back Aze."
"Sa-Satou! W-why?"
"I wanted to see Aze's face so I've come back."

Ugeh, I'm going to vomit sugar.
Satou-san smoothly speaks some womanizer-like remark.

Aze-sama is, "Awawa"-ing, unable to speak clearly, but she looks really happy.
He's returned alone, Mia and the others aren't with him.

"Satou, didn't you get out?"
"Dumping Aze away, getting a new girl--"
"I've brought you souvenirs too."
"You know your stuff!"
"Wa~i, it's honey cakes!"
"Hyahho~! There's confetti candies too!"

Satou-san shrewdly gives the pixies with a bag containing some snacks, he's successfully neutralized the little intruders.

I think this reunion is too fast, but I'm glad that Aze-sama's gotten her energy back.

The two have begun to flirt with their conversations on the balcony, but those two probably won't do anything wrong even if I leave them alone.
Satou-san seems to have that in mind, but Aze-sama doesn't seem like she'd do the common mistake of young people.

I leave the rest to the pixies as I'm going to Nea's place to prepare the banquet tonight.

SS: The Decision of Sir Trell

"Sir Trell[2], will you not consider?"
"Zeff-dono. I am regretful to leave you who joined at the same period as me, behind, but I do not think a [Wyvern Rider] who has lost his partner to be of any use to His Majesty."

Sir Julberg couldn't break the firm decision of Sir Trell either.

"I will whip this old bones and rush in haste if a demon lord appears in the Royal Capital."
"Do you have somewhere to go in mind?"
"There is a town of [Magic Hunter] called Puta to the east of the Royal Capital, you'll find a hidden village that gather wyvern eggs to the southeast of that town. I intend to rear the youngsters who aspire to become wyvern riders, and raise them to become the next Shiga Eight Swords members."

Sir Julberg had never heard Puta town, but he nonetheless nodded to Sir Trell while vaguely imagining the southeast direction of the Royal Capital.
The territory that's famous for its wyverns is Seryuu Earldom, but the place where the wyverns are nesting is on the border to the Dragon Valley. It's a place that's been designated as confinement place since the Ancient King Yamato's era, so Sir Julberg didn't bring it up.

Sir Julberg himself has been raising the next generations of Shiga Eight Swords since several years ago, he's given expensive magic swords to promising young talents.

"Sir Trell, this is a parting gift."
"Is this a magic weapon?"
"Umu, this has been granted to me by His Majesty, but contrary to its delicate appearance, it's an excellence spear with wonderful magic power conduction on par with the divine holy swords."

Sir Trell takes a noticeably long lance from the magic weapon rack in the corner of the room.
He streams it with my magic power, producing Magic Edge.

"Oh, how light."

Normally he would have needed to concentrate so much that it'd look like he'd pop his veins, but Sir Trell couldn't hide his surprise to see it happened after he only slightly concentrated.
Sir Julberg who's of the same opinion as him assents.

"Take whichever one to your liking. I do not mind if you give it to your future pupil."
"Is it fine? Giving me such a sword and a spear."
"I do not mind. It's an investment for someone who will protect Shiga Kingdom someday."

This is enough to be an embezzlement case in Shiga Kingdom, but it won't be a problem if he just reports it to the accounting head of Shiga Kingdom Holy Knight to process the account

book.

◇

"Boss, there's no road that goes to that mountain you know?"

The one-armed boy[2] answered in bewilderment.

"Then, is there no noble who has an airship or a flying-type monster?"
"I'm guessing that's only the Duke or some army men under the Duke."

A female magic hunter who was standing beside the boy answered Sir Trell haphazardly.
Surely, it is not possible for an airship to exist in such a small backwater town inhabited only by the magic hunters.

An indescribable atmosphere drifts to this rural town, increasing tension.

--That is, a black shadow.

"You do not seem to be a normal person. Who are you. Declare thy name."

Sir Trell asked for the person's identity in place of the other people who couldn't move.
However, the black mystery man[2] only laughs.

"To be so insolent while being an ordinary man dearu. I only desire tomatoes. I do not give my name to rubbish dearu."
"What'd you say..."

Sir Trell pulls the sword on his waist.
The blade is charged with red light.

The three retainers who are following him also draw their swords toward the one who's being impolite to their master.

"Fuhn, looks like you're eager, however, since you've drawn your sword, I assume that you are prepared to be cut?"
"As someone who have a duty toward Shiga Kingdom, I cannot let a suspicious person like you roam free. Be at ease since I will not take your life."

The aforementioned one-armed boy jumps between the two sides of battle-honed people who are about to clash.

"P, please wait Boss Black. Boss needs the tomatoes right? I know about it so I'll guide you there."

After hearing the boy, the mystery man relaxes his posture and separates his hand from the rapier on his waist.

"Are you saying the truth dearuka?"

"Un, tomatoes are those red fruits right?"

Originally, it was called red fruits and not a popular vegetable substitute, but ever since the demand and price for it increased after being popularized by the [Tomato Noble]-sama, it had started being cultivated not only in deserted villages, but also the vacant lands in the Puta town.

The mystery man who has waterweed-like hair floats a smile that shows his wolf-like fangs when he hears the boy's explanation.

"That is the thing I seek. Cutting an old man with short remaining life is not my real intention. I will follow your wish if that means getting my hands on the tomatoes."
"Wait, the battle is--"
"Pull back, menials."

The mystery man's eyes emits red light, and then Sir Trell and his retainers stop moving like a stone.
Sir Trell is reminded of the time when he fought a life or death battle against a vampire during the prime of his life.
His movement got stopped at that time just like now. However, vampires shouldn't be able to move during broad daylight.
The man shouldn't be able to spellbind him, who's one of Shiga Eight Swords, in an instant, if he weren't a higher vampire or an ancestor vampire who appears in tales.

--That means, the identity of the mystery man is.

"What are you doing, guide me."
"Un, leave it to me. What kind of tomatoes are you looking for? The ripe soft one? Or the slightly green firm one? The inn old man can prepare you red sauce or white sauce if you need them."
"Hou, by red sauce, you mean ketchup huh? Leave that place for later. First, I need tomato seedlings."

The two leaves the gate while having a peaceful conversation.
Sir Trell and his retainers are finally able to move after the one-armed boy has returned from guiding the man to the tomato cultivation in the town.

"Boy. What happens to the black clothed man from earlier?"
"Eh? That boss flew in the sky to the direction of the duchy capital after buying a lot of tomatoes. Magic is really amazing."

Sir Trell is getting dizzy from the boy's words.
He cannot believe the mystery man who had that much power only wanted to buy vegetables.

"Oh? Kon[1], what's with that sword?"
"Eh? This? I got it from Boss Black. Nice isn't it?"

It's a single-edged sword that even the boy with his small build can lightly swing.

"Boy, give me that sword."
"Eeh~"
"I will not deprive it from you."
"Okay then."

Sir Trell puts magic power into the sword he's received.
Flash overflows on the sword at once.

"Uwah, what what?"
"That's dangerous!"

Besides Sir Trell who's expected it, people are in panic toward the spectacle.

"This is a magic sword. Moreover, it's a true magic sword that one can't get hold of unless they defeat the『Floormaster』or the『Roommaster』in the labyrinth's depth."
"Eh~, that's amazing."

The boy who doesn't understand the value laughs at his own sword.

"Boy, I'll teach you the way to use this sword."
"Alright, that's a promise."

Sir Trell has sent his retainers to the Duchy Capital in order to secure the way to cross the mountain range, during the wait, he's decided to teach the boy the way to use a sword to ease the boredom.

The boy who had accidentally earned a magic sword and tutored by a former Shiga Eight Swords member endeavored some extra hard trainings until he couldn't move.

The retainers have returned after getting some [Wing Lizards] in order to cross the mountain, and then Sir Trell and them embark toward the mountain range.

"And so, have you become able to use the Magic Edge that the former Shiga Eight Swords knight-sama taught you?"
"No way I can. Even I would've become a knight if I could. At most I can only put in my magic power after concentrating for a long time. Moreover, I can't move anymore after using it thrice, so it probably has no use against goblins."

The one-armed boy continues to see Sir Trell's party off while holding the magic sword that's making some small crackling sounds.

1. The boy Kon doesn't know that the Black Dragon Heiron appears in the mountain where the wyverns live.
2. ***Characters***

   One-armed boy: The magic hunter Kon.
   Middle-aged Woman: Kena. The leader of the magic hunter party Kon belongs to.

Mysterious Man: True Ancestor Ban. He's camouflaged his skin and hair color with magic. A vampire who doesn't lose to the sunlight.
Sir Trell: The former fourth place of Shiga Eight Swords. The person who challenged and lost to a lesser dragon. Sir Trell is one of Shiga Eight Swords who appeared riding a wyvern in Chapter 10

SS: Mia's Music Hall

"Mia-sama, your performance is wonderful today too."
"It really is, I can never get tired listening to Mia's music."
"Haven't I told you so many times to use 'sama'!"
"You two, don't make a fuss in front of Mia-sama."

After the performance is over, the fairykin children and long-earkin children are clamoring.
Even though I want to bask in the lingering memory of the performance, I can't,
What troubling children. I'm troubled--I really am you know?

I wish they would be like the grandpas and grandmas who have come to listen to the performance, smiling, laughing and clapping lightly.

Even the noisy pixies in Boruenan Forest became quiet like they had dozed off after my performance was over. They didn't sleep you know?
I mean, when I asked them, "How was the performance?", they replied "Today was the best!", or, "The melody was so enjoyable like I was in the country of dream".... They weren't sleeping right?

"Mia-chan, you must be thirsty right. Eat this melon that's been cooled in the well water."
"Nn, thank you."

I bite the melon that grandma's given me.
Sweet. Fresh sweet taste spreads in my mouth.
While leaving slight aftertaste, my throat is wet after only chewing several more.
The watermelons of Boruenan forest are delicious, but Selbira's labyrinth melons don't lost to it.

"Mia-chan, please teach me the leaf flute."
"Teacch."

The little children came asking with leaf flutes made of Fesheka grasses on their hands.
Humans don't care about grasses name. To them, all grasses, either it's Fesheka or Chemirana, are called weed.
It's kind of sad. A little bit, you know?

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"Listen to my songgg!"

Arisa cried so while strumming a strange lute.
I think it's just a noise, but this is a secret okay?

"What?"
"This is called a guitar. I've asked Master to make it."
"Mwuu."

I think it's unfair that it's always only Arisa.

"Satou."
"Does Mia want me to make something too?"
"Nn."

Satou will immediately make it if I ask him.
I mean, we're engaged. He's head over heels for me. Absolutely you know?

"What kind of instrument do you want?"
"Pipe organ."
"Pipe organ? That's a bit too big, maybe a piano or an electronic keyboard would be better?"

I wonder if a [Pipe Organ] is impossible even for Satou?
It's Satou that can create legendary equipments and strange magic items, he should be able to make a [Pipe Organ].

"You can't?"

I implore Satou with the [Uruuru] attack that Arisa's taught me.
Aze told me that the hero Daisaku said, "Pipe organ is the best musical instrument."
When I told that to Satou, he said, "Alright, leave it to me!"

--I'm happy, but I've a mixed feeling about it.
Affair is no good you know? Absolutely!

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"Now, Mia. Please play it."
"Amazing..."

A [Pipe Organ] has been put in a certain underground test site of the Ivy Mansion.
Many golden pipes are lined up, shining more brightly than the sunlight filtering through trees in a summer day.

The deep of the sound is different compared to the piano that Satou's made as a practice.
I've become absorbed with the [Pipe Organ], playing a song.

--Sounds fall from the sky.

I play the melody of [Gallg], [Wagnaa], and [Motsart] I've heard from Satou, and the symphony of Boruenan arranged for Piano.
<TLN: Wagner, Mozart, and, um, not sure.>

...Everyone looks strange.

They're crying even though music is a happy thing.

"Mia."

Satou wipes my cheek with a handkerchief.
Did I cry too? Truly?

"It was really beautiful."
"Nn."

I'll invite grandpas and grandmas to the Ivy Mansion and play for them next time.
I won't leave the fairykin children and the long-earkin children out in the cold too of course.
Maybe?

SS: Liza's Service?

Bath is a wonderful thing.
There are many things Master has bestowed me, but I don't think there is anything else that grants this luxurious supremely blissful warmth.

Meat is a special exception of course.

"Huh? Liza-san you're still in there? Isn't it about time for the water to become cool?"
"It's alright since it's still hotter than my body temperature. Mia should have been the one who will be cleaning the bath today, has it been changed to Arisa?"
"Tahaha, it's a bit you know, the turn for Master's punishment..."

...Again huh.
Arisa probably had tried to incorrigibly [sekuhara] Master and got punished for it.

I think it's natural for people to try to increase their descendants, but Master doesn't seem eager to leave behind offspring for the next era.
After all, he said that he would wait five years for Arisa and Lulu.

I stand up since I feel bad if I become a hindrance for her punishment duty.
Arisa apologized with some grown-up words, "This looks like I drive you out, sorry.", but it's a trivial matter.

Since I can enter the bath tomorrow, though it's a luxurious situation for a slave to be.

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"28-hour bath is it?"
"Yep, the teleportation point in the middle-layer is narrow, so I'm thinking of making a new villa with a bath that's ready to be filled with warm water anytime. I want to hear opinions from everyone. What do you think Liza?"
"I am in favor of course."

What a splendid thing!
To be able to submerge in warm water all day long!

On the next day, we've come to the area where great many aquatic monsters inhabited, it's the place where the villa is going to be built. Many monsters like Labyrinth Monstrous Fish, Bombardment Shellfish, Crayfish with wave-shaped claws, and Leaping Flounders attacked us, but they were no match against us who were dominated with appetite.
We had a bit of a hard fight against the Labyrinth Coral who spread paralyzing mist, but we were able to win due to Master's [Supoort], and Arisa's and Mia's magic aid.
After trampling the Sea Eels on the sandy beach area that scatter lightning spheres from the gem on their foreheads, and breaking through hard monsters like the Jewel Sea Cucumber and the Vajra Shellfish, we have finally arrived at the planned place for the villa.

"Are you going to build it here?"
"Yeah, there's a heat source from the magma pool underneath this area."

I listen to Arisa and Master's conversation with serious face.
I don't know what magma pool is, but it must be some kind of magic tool that can boil water.

My role is to build the villa in accordance to Master's instruction.

....Master made holes for the piping in an instant using earth magic.
He even made the ditch for drainage in a blink of an eye with earth magic.

I stand idly while waiting for Master's order, but there's no turn for me.
I wonder what should I do?

When I asked, Master kindly said, "You had been opening the road until we got here right? Having a good rest is also a part of the job you know."
However, I think Master who's ensured everyone's safety until now is the one most tired.

The only thing that I can do without hindering Master is helping Lulu preparing the lunch.
Let's do the thing I can do with my utmost rather than lamenting my incompetence.

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When I come to call Master after having finished preparing the lunch, what greets me is the villa building that has been finished before I knew it.
It's a building that's far more splendid than the villa in the Area 4 of the upper-layer.

"Ah, Liza! Come here. See this large communal bathroom I've finished."

Going to Master who's beckoning me, I arrive at the large communal bathroom.
There is a bathtub large enough for everyone to enter while still leaving some leeway.

"You can't enter it yet okay? It has to be poured with the hot water for awhile to wash away the rubbish and the sand."

I dip my finger in the bathtub water, the temperature is just right.
I'm driven with impulse to strip my clothes and jump on it right here and now, but the first bath belongs to Master.
Taking the first bath is something beyond a mere slave.

When Master enters the bath, I have to wash his back to heal his fatigue today.
Even Arisa screamed in delight when I washed her back, so Master will surely be content too.

For that sake, first, I have to fortify myself with a meal.
We went toward the sandy beach where Lulu was waiting with the seafood dishes.

"■■■Breeze"
"Kya"
"Noo"

Our skirts got flipped up with the voice of boy.
The children behind the boy are cheering for the multi-colored panties festival.
Geez, what lecherous kids.

"Geh, that Arisa is wearing trousers under her skirt!"

When I looked at the giggling group of boys beside the boy, there was no need for me to wonder the reason why the boy was frantically training [Breeze] spell.
I never had thought that he would be able to successfully chant the spell this quick, but it's only natural for a lady to prepare the minimum insurance.

Yet, the brats are booing.

"Sneaky!"
"I'm not."

Good grief, boys will be boys no matter the world.... I want you guys to follow our Master's example. He never did any prank despite sleeping together with such a beautiful girl like me.
My pillow with YES written on both sides is crying.

Oops, rather than that.

I drop my fist to the brats who are pointing at me while barking beside the boy.
And to the offender's head too of course.

"--Ouchh"
"Guha"

I fold my arms and glare at the two boys who have fainted.
The other boys are being tortured by the girls who got their skirts flipped.
Serves you right.

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"Now then, are you aware the reason why you're called here. Boy?"
"You beat us good back then, forgive me already."

The boy begs me with a pitiful face.
My sadistic heart is burning up after seeing that, but I endure it by thinking my beloved Master's smile in my mind.

Fuuh, good-looking boy is the best.

--Getting back to the subject.

"There are two roads you can choose now that you've become able to use life magic."

I speak to the boy earnestly.
First, become a life magic 'spell-user' and earn stable income.
Second, learn force magic and elemental magic to become a magician.

The boy answers with--

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"The first Arisa-sensei sponsored power-leveling rally~"
"O, oy, Arisa. You never said anything 'bout entering the labyrinth."
"I sure did~n't"

I take no notice of the flustered boy's words.
There's no way Area 11 can be any danger when you're with me and Nana.

"Carelessness is your greatest enemy~"

Haha, oh Tama, when did you get here.
Tama left a person-shaped spot of Shadow Stalker that had disguised itself as a rubbish below her.
Uwah, this one should have only appeared deeper in the labyrinth.
That was dangerous. We were saved thanks to the Ninja.

"Hey, would Tama also come with us?"
"Oukey"
"Thanks. I'll treat you to as many meat skewers you like when we get back."
"Wa~i"

I feel slightly guilty to see Tama who's innocently being happy.

Afterward, we continued the easy power-leveling with Tama's enemy-search and Nana's protection.
The boy became silent halfway through, but it shouldn't be because he had drank too many magic power recovery potion. It shouldn't be because he was forced to recover from the level up sickness by drinking magic potions.

And then, a water and earth magician is born during the time until the dusk.
Though the classroom above the ground should take time too, with this, the desired framework to make [Pendragon] bunch into magicians should be reached.

"Still, I understand why you want water magic, but why earth magic?"

Children probably would have chosen light or fire magic.

"I mean, Iruna-sensei said that the『Demand』was huge."
"You've sure gotten ahold of yourself despite being a child~"
"Well yeah. Moreover, Chevalier-sama wants earth magician right. I want to repay the favor to Chevalier-sama even for a bit."

How cheeky for a kid.
But, a boy is still a man even though he's young after all!

After fully patting and praising him, I treated him and Tama with a lot of meat skewers.
I couldn't compensate Nana who wanted [Arisa's collection of sayings], but I'll search some small accessories that she likes and present it to her.

Later, since I thought that giving only meat skewers was unsatisfactory, I presented him with short pants, but it was rejected.
Even though it should be short pants when you're talking about uniform for boys. Incomprehensible.

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Translated by Sousetsuka